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Alarmed and Dangerous

I read Eula Biss's essay about the contemporary fear of vaccines ["Sentimental Medicine," January] days after the violent deaths of twenty small schoolchildren in Newtown, Connecticut, and immediately drew a connection between the ethical questions surrounding vaccines and those surrounding federal gun laws.

Americans tend to regard both childhood vaccination and firearm ownership as personal decisions. With gun violence set to outpace car accidents as a leading cause of death in this country—having long since surpassed rubella and pertussis, thanks to vaccines—it becomes increasingly evident that gun control is above all else an issue of public health. We must acknowledge that many of the choices we consider private are in fact part of a far more complex ecology. Biss reminds us of the interconnectedness not only of individuals but also of the issues—from vaccination to gun control and beyond—that shape the course of our lives.

Suzanne Buffam
Chicago

Biss offers a welcome perspective on a topic that frequently causes distress for physicians, but she barely

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mentions another cause of unease among doctors: the commercialization of disease treatment in the United States. Insurance payments tend to reward procedure over prevention. The average payout a doctor receives for administering a vaccine is around sixteen dollars; removing a skin lesion can pay many times that.

A capitalistic mentality may also be at the root of vaccine refusal: we fear vaccines because we are unconvinced of the benefits of disease prevention generally. The patient-as-consumer doesn't participate because, in the absence of a manifest condition, he senses nothing is being offered. But shouldn't we hold medicine to a different standard, one free of the taint of the market?

Anastasia Feifer
New York City

Biss argues that immunization should be considered "not just in terms of how it affects a single body but also in terms of how it affects the collective body of a community." A third consequence is rarely discussed—vaccines' effect on viruses themselves. Every active infection is a workshop for pathogens, which can mutate rapidly and adopt new features from other viruses or even their host. By limiting the overall number of infections, vaccines give viruses less room to experiment, slowing their progress and helping to protect future generations.

Lisa M. Boulanger
Princeton, N.J.

History of Abuse

Barry Lopez's memoir of his sexual abuse ["Sliver of Sky," January] is a personal tragedy wrapped in a collective one—a tale of deception and betrayal that has been repeated over and over again. Personal disclosures like Lopez's contribute to ending such harmful interactions by reflecting back to society the consequences of inattention to the deepest needs of oneself and one's progeny.

It is advisable for parents to be wary of adults taking unusual interest in their children, but perhaps more important is vigilance against the erosion of parent-child bonds. Without that foundation in place, children will remain at risk of the perils Lopez describes.

John Leland
Los Angeles

I have spent nearly thirty-five years representing victims of sexual abuse in courtrooms across the country. The most common question I face is why victims remain silent for so long. The devastating psychological and emotional toll exacted by abuse prevents many from being able to articulate not only its impact but also the degree to which it has taken on a life of its own. By recounting the history of his abuse, Lopez provides an eloquent and emotionally resonant response to this question, one that lends precious insight to both victims and the public.

Paul Mones
Portland, Ore.

Nothing Compares 2 U

There is something darkly humorous about how Hilton Als exploits Jamie Foxx's stand-up comedy in his memoir about Prince ["I Am Your Conscience, I Am Love," December]. Als and Foxx commit similar

fallacies in their assessments of the artist. Foxx tells his audience when Prince's gayness is "too much," while Als warns his of an identity that is "not enough."

Prince resists essentializing, as does his music. He thrives on abstraction and a fluid identity that intentionally defies categorization. This is the political wink in his aesthetic: it opens up a realm of multiplicity. Als, in his possessiveness, overlooks the significance of Prince's

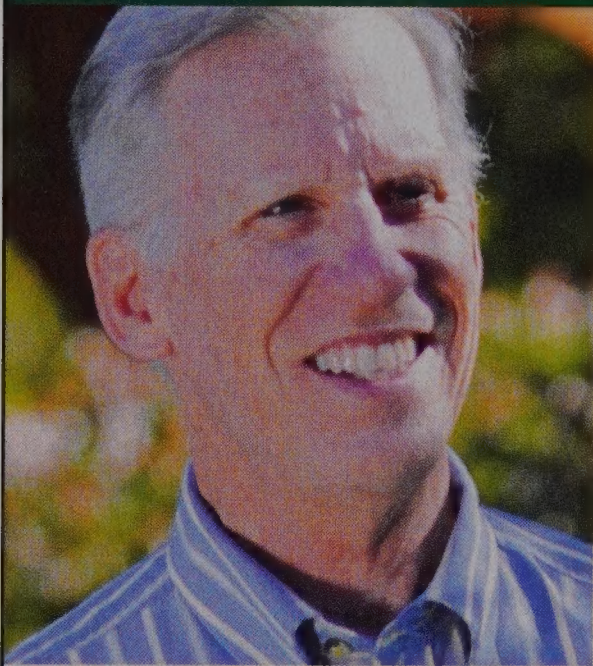
upending of tiresome notions of identity and genre.

Jacques El-Chayeb
Chapel Hill, N.C.

Correction

An item in February's Findings about a Canadian student's allergy-related lawsuit was based on a report by a satiric CBC radio program. We regret the error.

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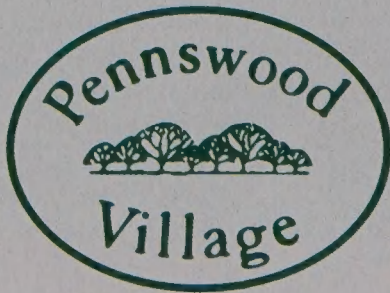
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EASY CHAIR

Blood Sport
By Thomas Frank

For a time in December, it looked as though the nation was finally ready to take on the gun culture. Perhaps you recall the moment: twenty grade-schoolers, along with their teachers and their principal, had been added to the roster of 30,000 people killed by guns in America each year. The details of the massacre were at once terrible and familiar—indeed, you could have guessed them as soon as you heard the first sketchy news bulletins. A murderer lost in some sanguinary fantasy. High-capacity magazines. In the starring role, one of our society's prized slaughtering machines: an AR-15 assault rifle. And for the families of the six- and seven-year-olds whose bodies were blown apart, there would be teddy bears, support groups, wooden messages from the secretary of education.

On December 21, a week after the shooting, began the second obligatory chapter in this oft-told tale. Wayne LaPierre, the lavishly compensated face of the National Rifle Association, stepped up to a podium at the Willard Hotel in Washington and twisted his features into an expression meant to indicate sorrow. What came gurgling from LaPierre's throat, though, was righteous accusation mixed with a heavy dollop of class resentment. It was the assembled men and women of the press who were somehow to blame, droned this million-dollar-a-year man who had apparently not bothered to read his script in advance. Gun owners were victims, you see, who had been demonized by the media and the "political class here in Washington." Oh, pity the man with a MAC-10!

Next came the other parts of the traditional catechism. America's lead-

ers were soft on crime, unwilling "to prosecute dangerous criminals." They gave too much money away in foreign aid. They miscategorized certain weapons as Thing A when they were obviously Thing B. Each of these grievances you could have heard, almost word for word, back in the 1970s. They are specimens of a chronic paranoia that never dissipates, no matter how many millions we imprison or how respectfully journalists learn to speak of the M16 and the sexy SIG Sauer.

But this time around, these bullet points were missing something. Matters had gone too far, and the NRA was desperate to escape the blame. But how? Well, if you are a prominent conservative lobbyist and one day there's a catastrophe that stems pretty directly from your cherished policy initiatives, what do you do? You insist that the world hasn't gone far enough in implementing your demands. So the solution to the massacre culture must obviously be more guns in more places than ever before: universities, churches, strip clubs, hospitals, tanning salons, bowling alleys.

And should something go wrong in this weapon-saturated world—for example, should someone use one of those weapons in precisely the way it was designed to be used—we may seek answers only within the narrow parameters of the ideologically permissible. Which is to say: We must meet every fresh mass murder with the conclusion that the United States, already home to some 300 million firearms, isn't weapon-saturated *enough*. The task before us is to arm not only the guards in our elementary schools but also the teachers, the custodians, the cafeteria workers, the hall monitors.

And on and on until the arms race is the preeminent logic of civilian life.

Only then will the streets of Dodge City be safe.

I worry that I have not made sufficiently clear where I stand on this issue. For the record: gun control works. It seems obvious to me that, when considering the towering difference in murder statistics between the United States and other industrialized lands, the most relevant factor is the ready availability of certain kinds of firearms. I believe that the ideology of libertarianism, with its twin gods Market and Magnum, is not just bankrupting us; it is killing us. And I believe that Wayne LaPierre bears a certain moral responsibility for the massacre culture, regardless of his intentions or his exalted stature in Washington.

The reason I want to be clear about this is that I also think Wayne LaPierre got something right. In his Willard Hotel address, he tried to get the assembled media types to acknowledge their own culpability for our pandemic violence. "Media conglomerates," he intoned, "compete with one another to shock, violate, and offend every standard of civilized society by bringing an ever more toxic mix of reckless behavior and criminal cruelty into our homes—every minute of every day of every month of every year."

Coming from the NRA, of course, this was pretty base hypocrisy. It doesn't take much skill with a remote to confirm that some of the most sadistic entertainment ever filmed follows the line of none other than the National Rifle Association. Over and over, we are shown spineless liberals with a soft spot for the murderers and

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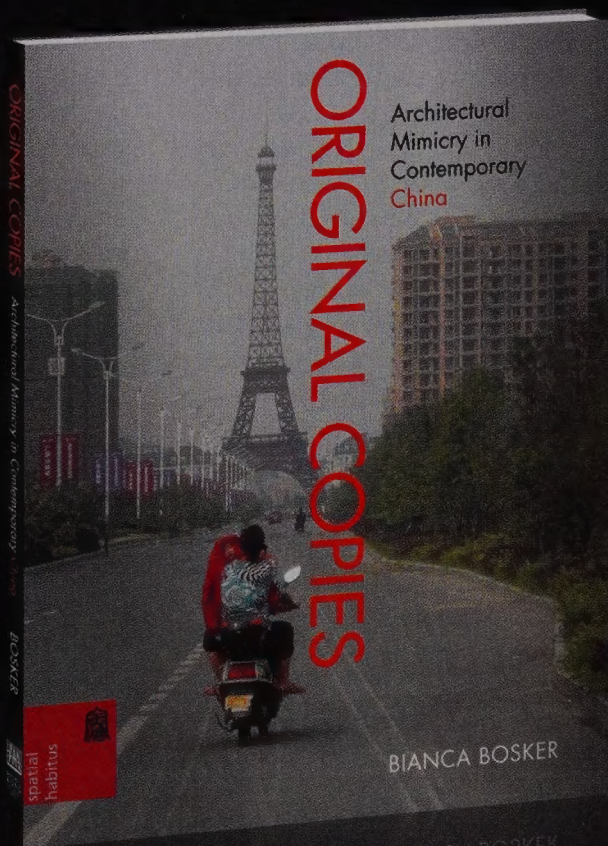
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rapists in our midst, who leave society's dirty work to the big man with the big gun. Indeed, Wayne LaPierre basically gave the genre a shout-out when he reasoned, all too cinematically, that "the only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun."

But as a description of the world we live in, what LaPierre said was ... well, correct. Media companies obviously do compete to project violence into our homes. And why is that? Because the American film industry is the second great pillar of the gun culture.

And it's not just Clint Eastwood's Smith & Wesson from *Dirty Harry*, which, as everyone who lived through the 1970s knows, was then "the most powerful handgun in the world," able to "blow your head clean off." Hollywood's cameras adore weapons of any kind, and pay them loving heed in movies of every political persuasion. Think of the close-up on Rambo's machine gun as it spasms its way through an ammo belt in the 1985 installment of the series, or the shell casings tinkling delicately on the floor as cops die by the dozens in *The Matrix* (1999), or the heroic slo-mo of Sean Penn's tommy gun in *Gangster Squad* (2013), or the really special Soviet submachine gun that everyone lusts after in Jack Abramoff's 1989 action movie *Red Scorpion*. It's the mother of all product placements, and as far as we know it doesn't cost the arms makers a dime.

Even more delectable is the effect that guns have on human flesh, a phenomenon so titillating for moviemakers that it often surpasses the pleasures of plot and dialogue. Discussing the many, many graphic shootings in his recent *Django Unchained*, for example, director Quentin Tarantino identifies screen violence as the reason most viewers go to his movies in the first place. "That's fun, and that's cool, and that's really enjoyable," he told NPR. "And kind of what you're waiting for."

In Tarantino's pseudohistorical revenge fantasies, humans are oversize water balloons just waiting to be popped, so that they can spurt their exciting red contents over walls and bystanders. The role of the star is relatively simple: he or she must make those human piñatas give up their payload. Yes, there are plots along the way, clever ones wherein Tarantino

burnishes his controversial image by daring to take on such sacred cows as Nazis and slave owners. But the non-stars in his movies mainly exist to beg for their lives and then be orgasmically deprived of them, spouting blood like so many harpooned porpoises.

Okay, I got carried away there. Let me catch my breath and admit it: Tarantino would never show someone harpooning a porpoise. After all, a line in the credits for *Django Unchained* declares that "no horses were harmed in the making of this movie." But harpooning a human? After having first blasted off the human's balls and played a sunny pop song from the Seventies while the human begged for mercy in the background? No problem.

The movies I describe here are essentially advertisements for mass murder. You can also read them in dozens of other ways, I know. You can talk about Tarantino's clever and encyclopedically allusive command of genre, or about how the latest Batman movie advances the "franchise," or about the inky shady shadowiness of, well, nearly everything the industry cranks out nowadays. And to give them their due, most of the movies I've mentioned take pains to clarify that what they depict are good-guy-on-bad-guy murders—which makes homicide okay, maybe even wholesome.

In decades past, let's recall, there was a fashion for viewing the gangster film as a delicate metaphor, interesting mainly for the dark existentialism it spotlighted in our souls. But today, as I absorb the blunt aesthetic blows of one ultraviolent film after another, all I can make of it is that Hollywood, for reasons of its own, is hopelessly enamored of homicide. The plot is barely there anymore. Good guys and bad guys are hopelessly jumbled, their motives as vague as those of the Sandy Hook shooter, Adam Lanza. A movie like *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012) is nearly impossible to make sense of; only its many murders hold it together. All the rest shrinks, but the act of homicide expands, ramifies, multiplies madly.

And what can we read in this act itself? Well, most obviously, that ordinary humans are weak and worth little, that they achieve beauty only when they are brought to efflorescence by the discharge of a star's sidearm. Also: killers are glam-

orous creatures. And lastly: society and law are futile exercises. Whether we're dealing with vigilantes, hit men, or a World War II torture squad, nobody can shield us from the power of an armed man. (Except, of course, another armed man, as Wayne LaPierre and Hollywood never tire of informing us.)

For the industry itself, meanwhile, so many things come together in the act of murder—audience pleasure, actor coolness, the appearance of art—that everything else is essentially secondary. Hence the basic principles of Hollywood's antisocial faith. A man isn't really a man if he can't use a shotgun to change the seat of another man's soul into so much garbage. Or if he doesn't know how to fire a pistol sideways, signifying that thuggish disregard for who or what gets caught in the spray of bullets.

At times, my erudite liberal colleagues have no problem understanding this. They're quick to characterize *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012) as an advertisement for torture and other Bush-era outrages.* *It's sadism!*, they cry. But the larger sadism that is obviously the film industry's truest muse ... *that* they don't want to discuss. Bring that up and the conversation is immediately suspended in favor of legal arguments about censorship, free speech, and the definition of "incitement." Movies can't be said to have *caused* mass murders, they correctly point out. Not even *Natural Born Killers* (1994)—a movie that insists on the complicity of the media in romanticizing murderers, that itself proceeds to romanticize murderers, and that has been duly shadowed by a long string of alleged copycat murders, including the Columbine massacre. No, these are works of art. And art is, you know, all edgy and defiant and shit.

Not surprisingly, Quentin Tarantino has lately become the focus for this sort of criticism. The fact that *Django Unchained* arrived in theaters right around the time of the Sandy Hook massacre didn't help. Yet he has refused to give an inch in discussing the link between movie violence and real life. "Obviously I don't think one has to do with

* Yet few of them complained about Tarantino's 2009 slice of war porn, *Inglourious Basterds*, since the people being tortured so graphically and so hilariously by a U.S. Army hit squad were Nazis.

the other,” he told an NPR interviewer. “Movies are about make-believe. It’s about imagination. Part of the thing is we’re trying to create a realistic experience, but we are faking it.”

Is it possible that anyone in our cynical world credits a self-serving sophistry like this? Of course an industry under fire will claim that its hands are clean, just as the NRA has done—and of course a favorite son, be it Tarantino or LaPierre, can be counted on to make the claim louder than anyone else. But do they really believe that imaginative expression is without consequence? One might as well claim that advertising itself has no effect—because the spokesmen aren’t really enjoying that Sprite, you know, only pretending to. Or that TV speeches don’t matter, since the politician’s words are strung together for dramatic effect, and are not themselves a show of official force.

To insist on a full, pristine separation of the dramatic imagination from the way humans actually behave is to fly in the face of nearly everything we know about cultural history. For centuries, people misinterpreted the reign of Richard III because of a play by Shakespeare. The revival of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s was advanced by D. W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation*. In our own era, millions of Americans believe in the righteous innocence of businessmen because of a novel by Ayn Rand.

And here is why I personally will never believe it when the film industry claims its products have no effect on human behavior. Like every American, I carry around in my head a collection of sights and sounds that I will never be able to erase, no matter what I think about Hollywood. To this day, those bits of dialogue and those filmed images affect the way I do everything from answering the phone to pruning my roses. I can’t get on my Honda scooter without recalling Steve McQueen in *The Great Escape*, or look out an airplane window without remembering *The Best Years of Our Lives*. When I shot at paper targets in the Boy Scouts, I thought of *Sergeant York*, and should I ever become an L.A. cop I will probably mimic the mannerisms of Ryan Gosling in *Gangster Squad*.

I doubt very much that we will see effective gun control enacted this

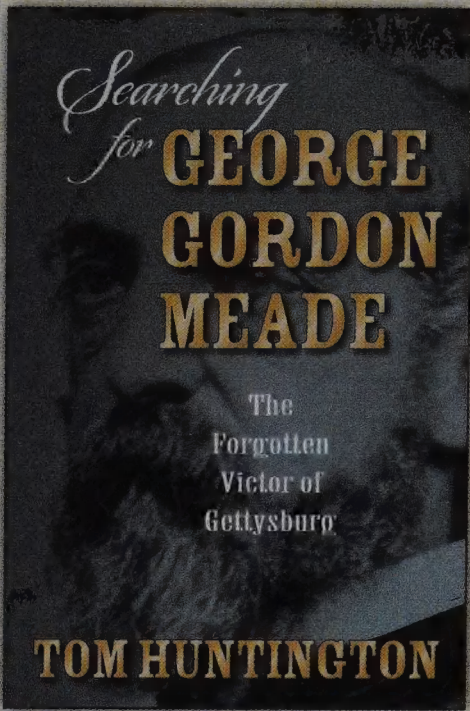
time around. Oh, the rules have already been tightened in New York, and the president will gamely joust with the House of Representatives over renewing the ban on assault weapons. But it won’t go much further. The political arm of the gun culture, headquartered at the big NRA building in northern Virginia, is still powerful enough to block any meaningful change.

However, the other pillar of the gun culture—the propaganda bureau relaxing in the Los Angeles sun—is much more vulnerable. Its continued well-being depends to a real degree on the approbation and collaboration of critics.

Which is to say that my colleagues in journalism are, in part, responsible for this monster. We have fostered it with puff pieces and softball interviews and a thousand “press junkets”—the free vacations for journalists that secure avalanches of praise for a movie before anyone has seen it. This refusal on the part of critics to criticize is what has allowed Quentin Tarantino to be crowned a cinematic genius of our time. (When a journalist refuses to grovel, however, Tarantino gets awfully peevish. “This is a commercial for the movie, make no mistake,” he recently told an interviewer bold enough to ask him an uncomfortable question.)

It is time for the boot-licking to end. Mick LaSalle, film critic for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, recently recalled how he self-censored a review of *The Dark Knight Rises*, declining to say in print that he found it to be “a wallow in nonstop cruelty and destruction.” But in the wake of the Connecticut school massacre, LaSalle explained, he had come around to a new understanding of critical responsibility. “If movies are cruel and nihilistic, say so,” he wrote. “Say it explicitly. Don’t run from that observation.”

It’s a lesson that every one of us in journalism ought to be taking to heart these days. It is our job to say it explicitly—to tell the world what god-awful heaps of cliché and fake profundity and commercialized sadism this industry produces. The fake blood spilled by Hollywood cries out for it.



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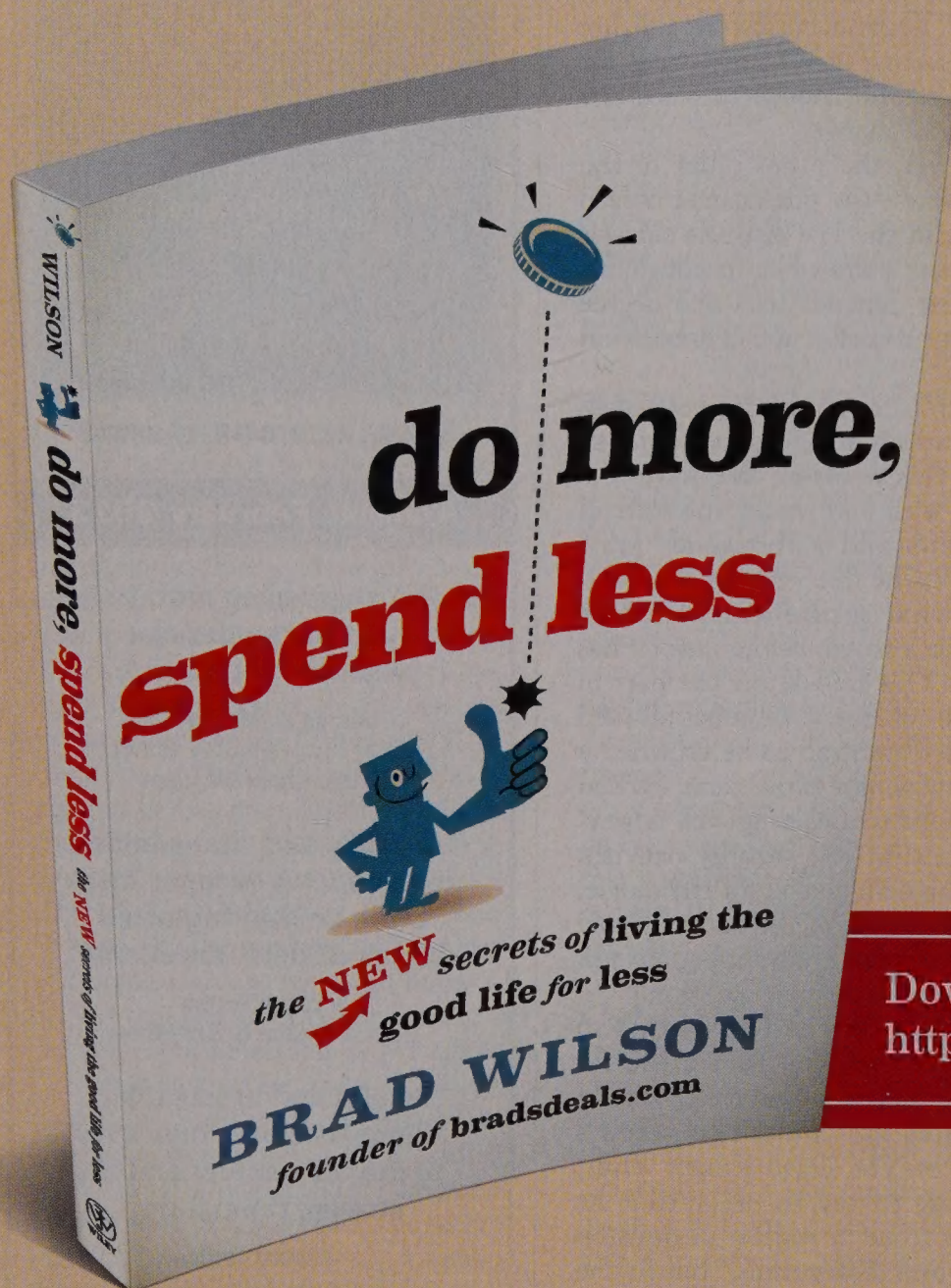
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THE ANTI-ECONOMIST

The Fall and Rise of Occupy Wall Street

By Jeff Madrick

A year and a half after the takeover of Zuccotti Park there exists a widespread conviction that Occupy Wall Street ultimately failed, and that it did so for lack of commitment, organization, and clear objectives. “The problem with the movement,” wrote *New York Times* columnist Andrew Ross Sorkin last fall, on the anniversary of the occupation, “was that its mission was always intentionally vague.” For this reason, Sorkin argued, OWS “will be an asterisk in the history books, if it gets a mention at all.” This response was typical of probanking commentators, but many progressives arrived at the same conclusion. “What do we have to show for [Occupy] today in our ‘normal lives?’” asked my *Harp-er’s* colleague Thomas Frank in *The Baffler*. (His answer: “Not much.”) Occupy began with great promise, wrote Frank, but it had become “mired in a gluey swamp of academic talk and pointless antihierarchical posturing.”

Veterans of the left had already been frustrated by the occupiers’ lack of leadership and determined unwillingness “to say clearly and succinctly why they’re there,” as Doug Henwood, publisher of the newsletter *Left Business Observer*, put it. So it was inevitable that these shortcomings should be blamed when the movement failed to re-establish a geographic base or regain media prominence after its eviction from Zuccotti Park by the New York City police. But it has become increasingly clear that OWS didn’t fizzle because its objectives

were too muddled or its talk too abstract or its organization too chaotic. In fact, the movement was undone by a concerted government effort to undo it.

The most effective strategy of suppression was mass arrest. When the protesters organized a march across the Brooklyn Bridge two weeks after the occupation began, hundreds were arrested and bound with zip ties. In many cases, marchers were offered conditional dismissals—in essence, told they would not be held responsible for the initial charge unless they committed another offense. This naturally had a chilling effect on future protests. Who would risk a second charge and possible jail time? Targeted preemptive arrests were commonplace before major rallies. One protester was arrested on two warrants for public urination from 2007, though the real offender was a different person with the same name. An obscure and usually unenforced 1845 law criminalizing the wearing of masks at public gatherings was used to justify the arrest of occupiers in bandanas.

In a report published last summer, the Protest and Assembly Rights Project—a group of justice clinics housed at major law schools, including those of Fordham, Harvard, New York, and Stanford Universities—documented 130 examples of excessive use of force by the NYPD during the occupation and in the months afterward, actions that vio-

lated protesters’ civil rights and the terms of various international human rights treaties.

Many acts of police aggression were captured on tape. One week into the occupation, a deputy inspector named Anthony Bologna pepper sprayed a group of women with no apparent provocation. (After a video of the event went up on YouTube, Bologna became the only officer to be disciplined for misconduct relating to the protests, losing ten vacation days.) During a march near Union Square, a café worker stepped outside to record footage. Though not a participant in the demonstration, he was thrown to the ground by a police officer. The officer—whose white shirt signified that he was of high rank—then accused the man of obstruction of justice. That same day, police pulled a marcher from behind the orange netting used to “kettle”—that is, corral and cordon off—protesters, brought her to the ground, and dragged her along by the straps of her backpack. Three officers held her head down while she was arrested. Further examples are too numerous to dismiss as the actions of a few stray cops. At the very least, it’s evident the police department was not controlling its own.

The eviction of the encampment, in the early hours of November 15, 2011, involved yet further instances of excessive force. A former New York Supreme Court justice, serving as an independent legal observer of the

police, witnessed an officer throw a protester to the ground and hit her in the head. When the observer asked the officer why he had done it, he pushed her up against a wall and asked if she wanted to be arrested. A New York City councilman was pushed to the ground and arrested. The use of batons and pepper spray and the dragging of protesters were well documented by witnesses. One reason these abuses didn't get more attention was that the mayor imposed a media blackout on the eviction raid—in itself probably a violation of international human rights agreements. A local CBS affiliate claimed that the NYPD kept its news helicopter from filming police action, though only the Federal Aviation Administration has authority to close airspace. Examples of violence against reporters were also plentiful.

Before the eviction, police placed a manned watchtower at Zuccotti Park. Occupiers asserted that their apartments were under NYPD surveillance. If this sounds fanciful, consider that the Partnership for Civil Justice Fund obtained reports in December showing that both the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security had monitored and investigated occupiers. In the FBI's case, this began before the park was even taken over: the bureau had informed officials at the New York Stock Exchange of impending protests a month before they began.

Of course the police have a duty to maintain order, and many officers were accommodating, some even friendly. But U.S. and international law allows police to use force only in proportion to any offense. It's clear from many documented cases that police response was out of all proportion to any provocation. Taken together, the coordinated and disproportionate actions of the NYPD, the FBI, and Homeland Security represent a campaign of suppression without which OWS might well have evolved into something more formidable, even in the cold of New York City's winter.

It's important to remember the real cause of Occupy's decline, because the widespread misapprehension that the movement was done in by its own fecklessness obscures two important points. First, Occupy achieved more than its

critics allow. True, the movement failed to realize specific legislative victories, but it did achieve its broader purpose: to raise awareness of the injustice of inequality in this nation. "We are the 99 percent" will remain with us as a political slogan every bit as galvanizing for the moment as "Hell no, we won't go" was for the draft protesters of the 1960s. Regarding financial regulatory reform—which Sorkin insists that OWS did not much affect—the Bank of England's executive director for financial stability said: "Occupy's voice has been both loud and persuasive ... [P]olicymakers have listened and are acting." Meanwhile, offspring of Occupy remain active in many areas—challenging foreclosures, protesting the *Citizens United* decision, calling for the mitigation of student debt, and providing aid to victims of Hurricane Sandy. This wide range of activities is exactly what such an "anarchic" organization is designed to do: produce localized, motivated, and independent action.

This leads me to the second truth ignored in the effort to dismiss Occupy for its lack of focus: similarly "unfocused" protests in past decades have had a profound effect on American history. "The great emancipatory gains for human freedom have not been the result of orderly, institutional procedures," writes Yale political scientist James C. Scott in *Two Cheers for Anarchism*, "but of disorderly, unpredictable, spontaneous action cracking open the social order from below." America was born of protest, and protest has remained at the heart of progressive change throughout the nation's history. This fact gets lost, Scott writes, when "the condensation of history [and] our desire for clean narratives ... conspire to convey a false image of historical causation."

Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward have shown how crucial labor protests were to the passage of New Deal programs. Those on the left who disparage Occupy may forget how the incipient civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements of the 1950s and 1960s were treated at the time. Martin Luther King Jr. was the subject of constant FBI surveillance, and the early Vietnam War protesters were regarded with open disdain by mainstream America. Scott argues that all of these movements were most success-

ful when they were "at their most disruptive, most confrontational, least organized, and least hierarchical." This has been no less true abroad. In a 2011 report, a United Nations representative wrote that, throughout history, "protests and demonstrations have been the engines of change" in society, and that the outcries of "human rights defenders all over the world have been the high-water marks." Social progress does not always arrive by way of the democratic ballot. The free labor market will not end gender and racial discrimination, as some right-wing economists have absurdly claimed. These changes come about when citizens take to the streets to demand them.

The lack of serious outcry against police brutality in New York and in other occupations—Berkeley, Oakland, Seattle—reflects how little most Americans appreciate the place of protest as a catalyst of social and economic reform in our own history and throughout the world. If I were a mayor or police chief who didn't want major social change, I, too, would have tried hard to stymie OWS.

When protest is suppressed in America, what is at stake? Reactions to protests in the past—the killing of four Kent State students by Ohio National Guardsmen in 1970, for example—were more terrifying than the response to OWS, but afterward public outrage led to real reform. Police forces across the nation placed sensible restraints on their practices—a process called "negotiated management." These moderated procedures started to become less restrained once again after the 1999 World Trade Organization protests in Seattle. Negotiated management was replaced with a version of "command and control" tactics. Though still restrained compared with those in the 1960s, police actions were explicitly designed to suppress protests—what some scholars call "strategic incapacitation." The new tactics involved frequent and often mass arrests, surveillance, the use of barricades and kettling, and infiltration. The NYPD used all these tactics, including undercover operatives, to manage protesters at Zuccotti Park.

Why has there been so little attention given to these abuses? It is not that the public is broadly indifferent

to policing issues. The NYPD has come under justified criticism for its surveillance of Muslims and its stop-and-frisk technique. A proposed city-council bill creating an NYPD inspector general has received widespread support and the endorsement of the New York Civil Liberties Union, the Brennan Center for Justice, and the *New York Times* editorial board. What are young Americans to make of the fact that no similar outcry arises in response to documented abuses of nonviolent protesters?

When protest in this country is met with derision or violence, and even commentators on the left blame the protesters themselves for this fact, it's clear that the nation is failing to protect its most important freedoms. "Those who won our independence believed," Justice Louis D. Brandeis wrote in 1927, "that the greatest menace to freedom is an inert people; that public discussion is a political duty... That it is hazardous to discourage thought, hope and imagination; that fear breeds repression."

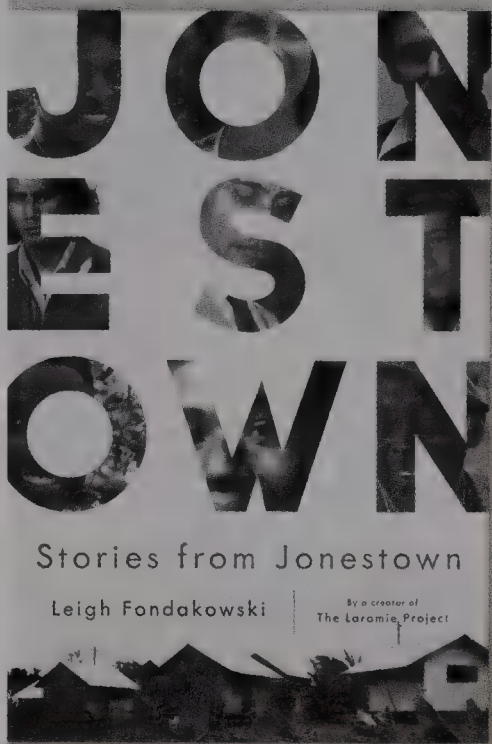
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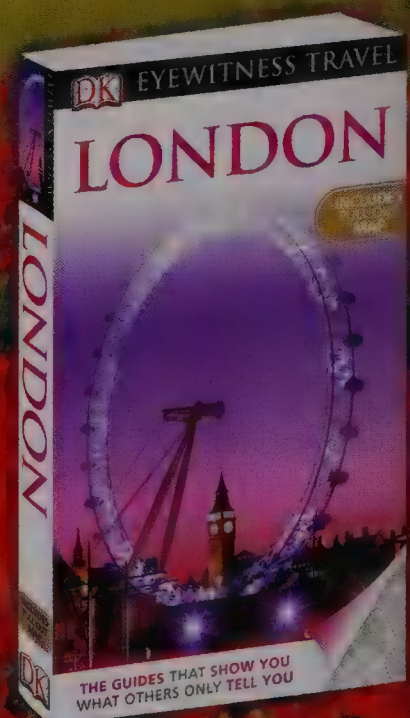
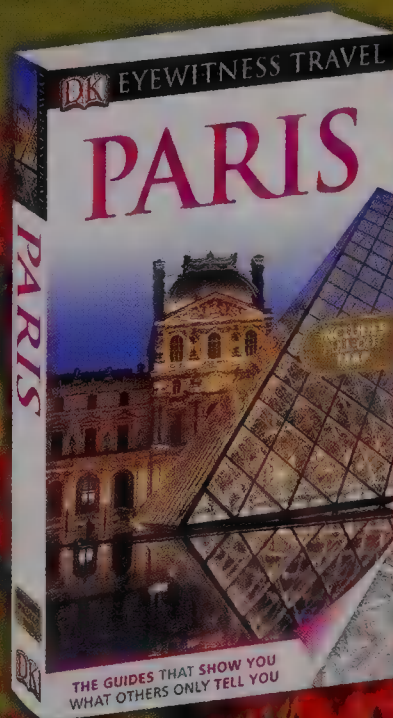
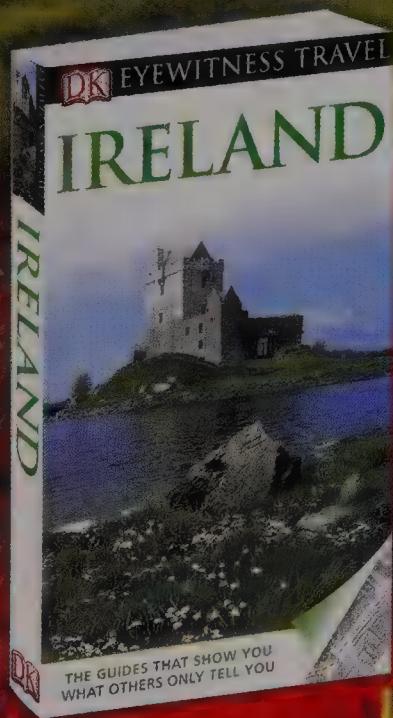
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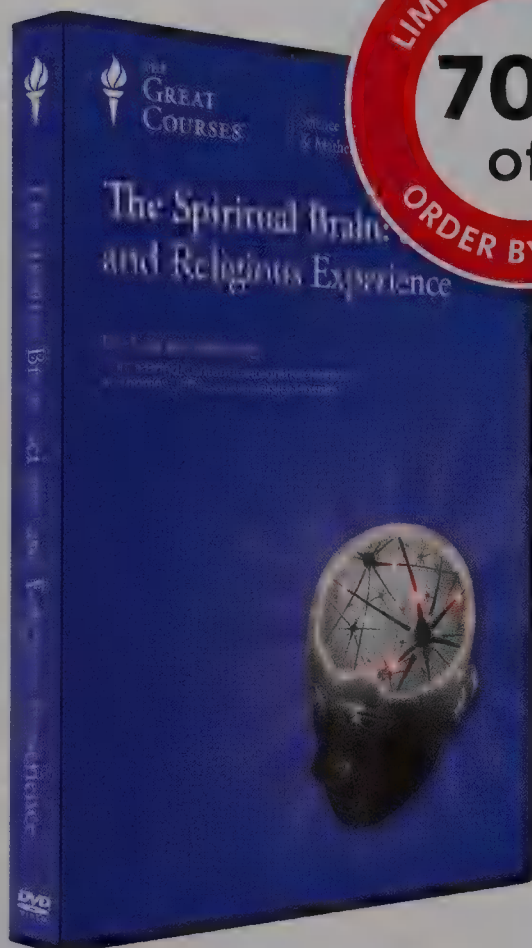
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- Under George W. Bush ■ 1 in 780
- Under Barack Obama ■ 1 in 6,631

*Figures cited are the latest available as of January 2013. Sources are listed on page 78.
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READINGS

[Fiction]

SO WHO COULD I TELL THE STORY TO

By Christa Wolf, from *City of Angels: Or, the Overcoat of Dr. Freud*, published last month by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Wolf, who spent most of her life in East Germany, was the author of many works of fiction and non-fiction, including *Cassandra* and *The Quest for Christa T.* She died in 2011. Translated from the German by Damion Searls.

—the story that now needed to be told, even though it wasn't a story at all? The principle of chance would have to decide for me: Who would sit next to me in the lounge for afternoon tea? It was Francesco. Alone. Not bad, as random choices go. I put the faxed newspaper article on the table in front of him, the one where my name appeared in the headline in the context of two letters of the alphabet that for months now had meant in the German media the highest degree of guilt, and I started talking, I talked the whole afternoon through, no one interrupted us, it got late, the sun set, unnoticed by us, and then I finally got to the end, and Francesco said: Shit.

Francesco had sat down by himself on that quiet, rainy Sunday, behind his newspaper, planning to complain again about the news from Italy. They've destroyed the country, he said. Our political class has destroyed the country, and we just sat and watched. That's how it always goes, I said, and since he looked up, paid attention, and seemed interested, I could put the faxed article on the table in front of him, and since he folded his newspaper and looked inquisitively at me, I could talk. Some people found Francesco insensitive, he

was inclined to angry outbursts, but he listened the right way, and I told him about the week, nine months before, that for me existed outside of time.

About your trip, every morning for ten days, to the part of East Berlin you knew least well. About the street that had just become famous, infamous, because it housed the offices of the agency that, of all the evils the crumbling state had stood for, was the most evil, the most demonic, contaminating everyone it touched. I tried to describe to Francesco the feeling you had when you turned into that courtyard surrounded by a square of monotonous five-story office buildings. He knew buildings like that, he said, and how could he not, as an architectural historian. The fleeting thought that this kind of agency could only be headquartered in buildings like that. Whenever you looked for a spot in the giant parking lot that was always full you were overcome with a feeling of suffocating anxiety, like you were in the wrong place. You already knew which entrance you needed to head toward, and you held your I.D. ready. The fact that the guard on duty gradually got to recognize you made it paradoxically easier for you to go inside. Obviously he had to write down your I.D. number again every time, and the different guards who had worked there before must have done the same thing, you thought as you walked upstairs, and you were well aware how much more apprehensive you would have been if you had been summoned to this building in the old days, three or four years ago, before the age had "turned." Not that you even knew whether outsiders—suspects?—were ever summoned to this building, or whether it was only employees of the organization who set foot here. Now its deepest secrets were spread out before almost everyone's eyes, a national legacy—before my eyes, too, insofar as they concerned me, I told Francesco. Can you understand, I asked him,

what it took to force myself to go back there every morning, to sign in with the woman—a nice, modest, and unassuming woman, by the way—who managed the minuscule portion of the enormous mass of material that concerned you and G., which she kept in a big green wooden box you called a “sea chest,” bringing out, every day, the portion of files you were to work on that day and laying them on the table in front of you in the visitors’ room where others were sitting with their own stacks of files at other tables.

It was very quiet in that room. The woman handling your files told you the rules, including that she had read through every word of the files before you, but, she promised you, she was sworn never to speak about their contents.

Listen, Francesco said, you don’t have to tell me any more. Yes I do, I have to, I said. There were a lot more files than you had expected. Forty-two volumes, later some additional ones too, including telephone-surveillance transcriptions. You had been under observation since very early on. And the files from the Eighties were not there, except for a single index card that indicated their contents. Destroyed. Or in any case, unlocatable.

And? Francesco asked. Would you have lived your lives differently if you had known?

I’ve thought about that a lot since then, I said. You and many of your friends had reckoned with the possibility that you were being watched. But not from such an early date. Not so uninterruptedly. You had told one another jokes on the phone, had even expressed your opinions pretty fully, just not naming names. You had to take at least that precaution. But you didn’t want to take everything so seriously and make yourself paranoid. It’s hard to describe, this state we lived in of simultaneous knowing and repressing, I told Francesco. Would

we have lived our lives differently if we had known everything? I don’t know.

That afternoon in the lounge I could not know how many evenings, how many hours, I would spend in the coming years on the never-ending conversation we called the “Stasi debate.” The state of our respective files. Whether a suspicion had been confirmed or defused. In the public media, two letters of the alphabet were all-powerful: IM. An *informeller Mitarbeiter*—“informal collaborator”—was the Stasi term for an informer, someone not an employee of the organization who filed a report. Anyone those letters were attached to, or seemed to be attached to, was condemned, irrespective of how much or how little the letters actually said about them.

The woman helping me, I told Francesco, who of course knew what was in my files, warned me on two different mornings that I was probably going to get an unpleasant surprise that day. And? Francesco asked. Did you get an unpleasant surprise?

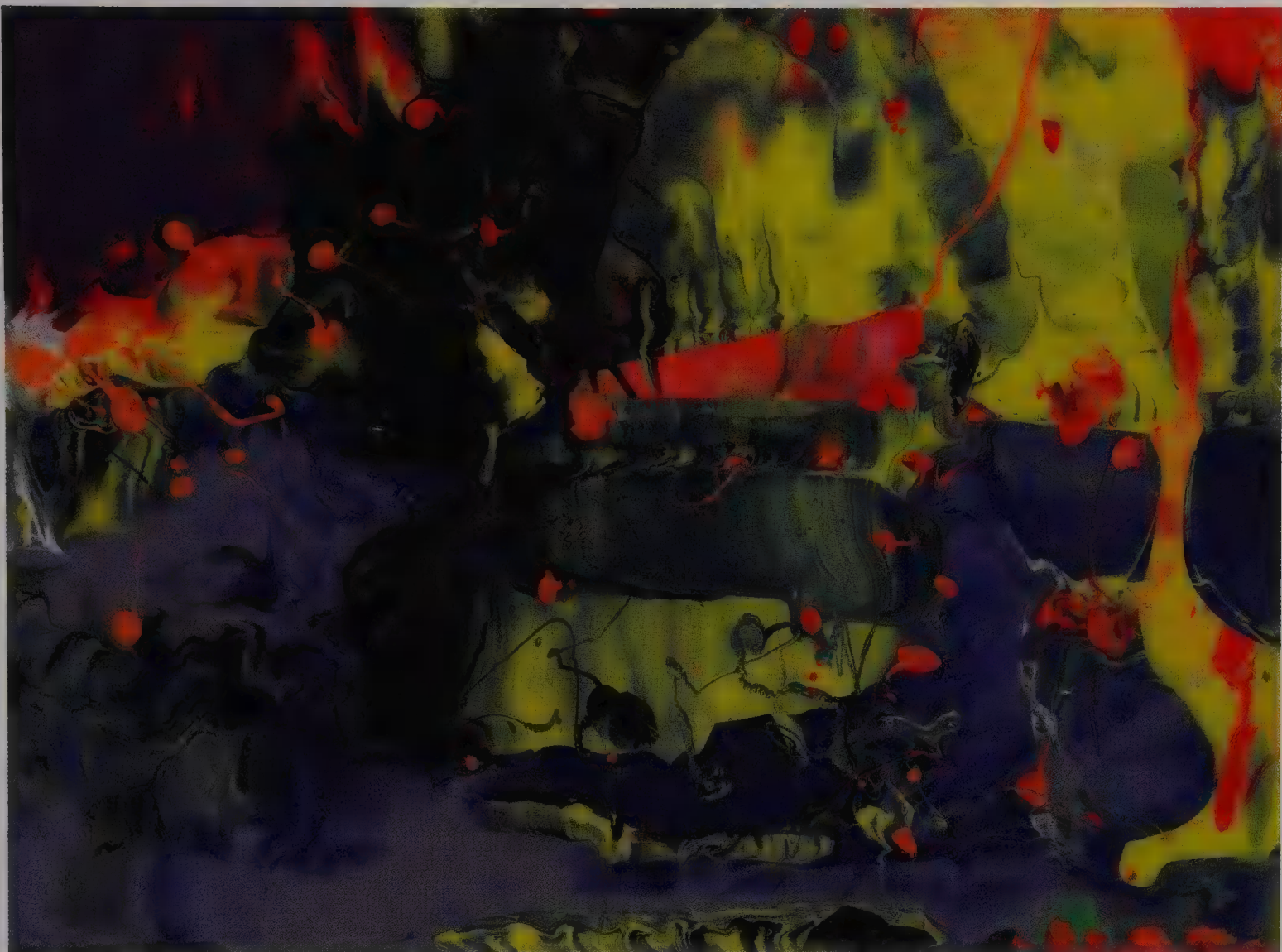
I did indeed: detailed reports by a friend about everything you were doing. Since you knew this friend well, this would be the first time you had the chance to ask for an explanation of how they got him to spy on you. They had had him in their clutches, it wasn’t his fault. But why hadn’t he given you a wink and a nod to warn you? Reading that report, I told Francesco, I felt like I was going to throw up, I couldn’t help thinking about all the people who had read these pages before me and how many would read them later. I asked myself if it should be allowed, and I developed an obsessive idea of a giant fire being lit in the courtyard of this desolate square of buildings and me getting all the files out of the sea chest and throwing them into the fire, handful by handful. Unread. What relief I would feel.

I can imagine, Francesco said.

Instead, I said, I had to hunt down code names in the files that I wanted to make copies of—a whole trunk of copies. I had to fill out forms requesting the copies, and other forms asking to be told the real names of the people who had spied on me. Then, a couple days later, there they were in front of me, black on white, although what I mostly did was skim them, because it was too embarrassing for me. More often than not the name confirmed a suspicion, but sometimes I was painfully surprised, and then, strangely, I quickly forgot them again.

At lunch you walked—to get out of that room with all the silent people reading, each one sunk in his or her own problems and apparently unable to talk to anyone else about their problems; a particular variety of shame prevented any of you from exchanging more than a quick greeting with the others—at lunch you walked across the courtyard into one of the other buildings, ate there in a kind of canteen that had clearly been set up for the employees of this organization, a meal prepared with no love; you surveyed the other people eating and wondered how many of them had been working there three or four years ago too, and whether they’d had to deny what they had earlier thought and done to get their present position. Or whether, on the other hand, they had formerly suppressed their real thoughts and now felt free. They sure didn’t look free, I told Francesco. But what does that prove.

I described for him how you became more and more depressed every day and longed for the moment when you could finally hand back the files and call it a day. And how, when you drove home down the familiar strange streets, you had the feeling that a process of wilting and fading had set in and made rapid progress on both sides of the street: the façades of the buildings seemed to have aged years in only a few days; the people on the sidewalks seemed shriveled, even though they were hauling their new purchases home in the



CR 915-8, *Ifrit*, an enamel-on-glass painting by Gerhard Richter, whose retrospective *Gerhard Richter: Panorama* was on view in September at the Centre Georges Pompidou, in Paris.

plastic bags with brightly colored new logos on them, the new things they had wanted so badly; even the new brands of car that showed up more and more often among the old cars didn't spread the joy they had been expected to spread, back when they were objects of longing on television. My own judgment might have been biased, I said to Francesco—maybe I was living through another one of those historical moments I was unable to celebrate the way other people celebrated them. I had to admit that my desires and most other people's didn't point in the same direction. And that that was the cause of many of my mistakes. Sometimes, driving back home, you had to stop, step inside one or another of the new shops, and buy a blouse or some other article of clothing that you then never wore. When you got back home you had to take a shower right away and change all your clothes.

Looking into these files completely undermined and defiled the past, you know, and poisoned the present along with it. Francesco said he didn't

entirely understand that. Facts suddenly bursting in on you can have a destructive effect too, I said, which made Francesco angry. Facts? he barked at me. Did I really think that what I found in those files was the truth about any facts?

That's what the public was made to think, I said. Exactly, Francesco said. Ask yourself why.

I have thought about that a lot, I said. I asked myself many times, when I got back from that place where the damage was documented but was also spread and deepened, whether that kind of knowledge could lead to the healing of any wounds.

Yes, of course, we knew we were under observation, I said. The cars parked in front of the house for weeks. The broken mirror in the bathroom. The footprints in the hall. The obviously opened and resealed letters. The many bad connections over the phone, the constant crackling. Of course. That was how the organizations responsible for these things functioned normally.

Weren't you afraid? Francesco asked. Of course we were. We had the normal fear you have about

any enemy with more effective methods at its disposal than yours. And it helped that you could call it “enemy” without qualification: the relationship was clear. That had taken some time. —I know, Francesco said, I know all about that. —As for the categories they had pigeonholed you in, you got that from the files, too: *feindlich-negativ*, “hostile-negative.” Well, really, you could have thought that up yourself.

You are a PUT and a PID, the woman helping with your files told you—Underground Political Activity and Political-Ideological Subversiveness. But what was the insidious poison you breathed in from these files that left you so paralyzed? You couldn’t put it into words at the time, but now I know: it was the brutal way they took your lives and made them trite, over hundreds and hundreds of pages. How comfortably these people fit your lives into their own way of seeing the world. Even if the facts that the observers reported on and a senior official occasionally summarized were true—which was by no means always the case; they had to be tailored to fit the interests and expectations of the people giving the assignments—even then, not one of them matched how I felt. If there’s anything I learned in reading those reports, I said, it’s what language can do to the truth. Those files were in the language of the secret police, completely incapable of capturing real life. An insect collector who wants to pin his find has to kill it first; the tunnel vision of the informer unavoidably manipulates what it finds, and he soils it with his miserable language. Yes, I told Francesco, that was what I felt: soiled.

Francesco again suggested a break. We got ourselves some more tea; it had grown dark, and we went over to the big window and saw the last glimmers of light on the ocean. Does that make sense? I asked Francesco. It wasn’t the mass of material, not the huge number of IMs assigned to us, not even their unmasking with their real names—none of that was what plunged me into a depression and gave me the feeling that I could not let myself go any deeper into these files or I would be pinned to a board by the demon pouring out of them. No, not pinned: infested. I could not allow them to triumph over us after the fact. Which is then what happened in the media after all.

So you would have liked it better if you’d had intelligent, sensitive informers spying on you? Francesco said.

“Liked” or “preferred” are words that truly do not belong in this context, I said. They never showed up in the reports either, of course. These informers must have laughed up their sleeves when they saw how seriously people were taking these often sloppy and careless

documents of theirs, how people were combing through them for incriminating material, giving them evidentiary power again, and using them to decide people’s fates. How people used these reports to deprive others of their livelihoods or keep them out of jobs that they themselves wanted. No one can open Pandora’s box and go unpunished, I said.

Francesco said it made him feel sick to imagine what would happen if all the secret files were ever opened to the public in Italy.

Not all of them, I said. Only from part of the country: only the northern files, for example, or the southern files.

It’s inconceivable! Francesco said.

I laughed. Night had fallen, I could see that Francesco had had enough, he wanted to leave, but I had to keep him there. Now I was getting to what I really had to tell him—the whole long story so far had just been the necessary background. The last day in the agency’s building, finally. You had more or less thoroughly read through the forty-two volumes of files, learned the informers’ real names and forgotten them again, you thought it was over, thought it was behind you, and then the woman helping you, with whom you had become almost friendly and who knew your files better than you did yourself, cleared her throat: There was something else. A feeling of looming disaster instantly came over you, without your having any idea of what there might still be in store, but you had to find out, right away. She hesitated. She was not allowed to show you your “Perpetrator File”—for the first time, this term! She had sworn not to. You insisted. Finally she got you to promise that you would never tell anyone she had broken the rule.

Then she left the room where you and she had been sitting alone, since it was after closing time, and came back a moment later with a thin green file folder that she put on the table in front of you. Even then you didn’t understand. She stood behind you and paged through the file for several minutes, during which she constantly looked around to make sure that no one would catch her in this forbidden act. It’s your handwriting, isn’t it, she asked you, quietly, as though worried, and it *was* my handwriting, I said to Francesco, and that was when I learned that hair standing up on the back of your neck is not just an empty phrase, it really happens. But you didn’t sign anything, no official agreement, nothing, the woman said. It would look very different if you had.

You didn’t have time, you couldn’t read anything carefully, just skim a couple pages: A clearly harmless report on a colleague, in your handwriting; reports from two contacts about three or four “meets” with you; and the fact that they had managed you under a code name.

These were what made this folder a “Perpetrator File” and what hurled you, without warning, into another category of human being.

The woman helping you, who hastily took the file away again, said: It was all more than thirty years ago, practically nothing happened, and there are meters and meters of “Victim Files,” surely everyone will realize how insignificant this ancient history is, but still, she had not wanted to let me fall completely unprepared into the trap that was about to open up under my feet. She read the newspapers too. Any journalist who asked her would get access to this file—as the law ordered! In her opinion, it was just a matter of time before someone received a tip and was on my tracks.

As for me, I said to Francesco, I heard myself say for the first time: I had forgotten all about that. And I noticed myself how implausible it sounded. The woman sighed: We hear that here a lot! And she rushed to take the file back out of the room.

Francesco said: Shit. Then, after a while: What are you going to do?

I said: I’m going to publish it all.

Think it over first, Francesco said. I read your German newspapers too. You need to ask yourself whether you can stand up to what’s going to happen.

I have no choice, I said. In any case, I couldn’t speak publicly about this file without causing problems for the woman who broke the rules by showing it to me. But I’ve just heard that she has died, very young, of cancer. So now I can talk about it.

[Declarations]

LE MISÉRABLE

From open letters by the actor Gérard Depardieu, addressed to French prime minister Jean-Marc Ayrault and to the Russian press. In January, Depardieu obtained Russian citizenship in order to evade a proposed tax increase on incomes exceeding \$1.3 million. Translated from the French by Ryann Liebenthal.

To Mr. Jean-Marc Ayrault:

Pathetic? You call it pathetic? Pathetic indeed! I was born in 1948—I started working at age fourteen as a printer, as a warehouse worker, then as a dramatic artist. I have always paid my taxes. At no point did I abdicate my responsibility. The historical films I’ve been a part of bear witness to my love of France and

its history. Sadly, I have no more left to do here—but I will continue to love the French public with whom I’ve shared so many emotions! I am leaving because you believe that success, creativity, talent—difference, in fact—must be punished. No one who has left France has been as insulted as I. Yet I will carry with me the spirit of a country that once was beautiful and that will, I hope, remain so. I give you my passport and my social-security card, of which I have never made use. We no longer have the same homeland—I am a true European, a citizen of the world.

I don’t cast stones at all those with high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes, who drink too much or fall asleep on their scooters: I am one of them, as your dear media so loves to point out. I have never killed anyone, I don’t think I have proved myself unworthy, I’ve paid €145 million in taxes in forty-five years, employed eighty people in businesses created for and run by them. I am not asking to be pitied or venerated, but I refuse to be called pathetic. Who are you to judge me like this—I ask you, Mr. Ayrault, who are you?

To Russian journalists:

Yes, it’s true—I have submitted a request for a passport, and I’m delighted that it’s been accepted. I adore your country—its people, its history, its writers. I love making films here, and I love working with your actors. I adore your culture, your intelligence. Life is good in Russia. I prefer the countryside, and I know of some marvelous spots. Standing at the edge of a forest of birch makes me feel well. And I’m going to learn Russian. I’ve even spoken about it with my president, François Hollande. I’ve told him all of this. He knows that I am very fond of your president and that the feeling is mutual. And I told him that Russia is a great democracy, and that it’s not a country where a prime minister calls one of his citizens pathetic. I like the press, but journalists are often so single-minded, which I find rather irksome. Out of respect for your president, and for your great country, I will say no more. If I did want to add something about Russia, one little prose poem comes immediately to my mind:

That in a country so big one is never alone,
Because every tree and landscape fills us with
hope.

There is no pettiness in Russia, but only noble
feelings.

And behind those feelings a great deal of modesty.
In your immensity, I never feel alone.

Slava Rossii!
Spasibo!

Gérard Depardieu

[Accounting]

BETTER SAFE

From the October 29, 2012, testimony of Martin Dumont to a Canadian public inquiry into corruption charges against various Montreal city officials. Dumont was an organizer for Union Montréal, the political party of the city's former mayor Gérald Tremblay, who resigned amid the allegations in November. Bernard Trépanier, the party's finance director, was arrested last May. Denis Gallant is the lead prosecutor. Translated from the French by Jess Cotton.

DENIS GALLANT: To your memory, did people come to Mr. Trépanier's office to bring donations to Union Montréal?

MARTIN DUMONT: If you're asking whether I saw monetary transactions between visitors and Mr. Trépanier, the answer is no. We called Mr. Trépanier's office the aquarium, because it didn't have any windows but the front of the office was all glass with vertical blinds.

GALLANT: Did you ever see cash in the offices?

DUMONT: Yes. For example, for a brunch or a spaghetti dinner, we'd have 400 guests, each paying thirty-five dollars.

GALLANT: Did the Vieux-Montréal offices have a safe?

DUMONT: Yes, in Mr. Trépanier's office.

GALLANT: Did you ever see the contents of the safe in the course of your duties?

DUMONT: One time.

GALLANT: Can you give us some details from that episode?

DUMONT: I was sitting in my office, and I remember that it was starting to get dark outside, so it was definitely late afternoon, perhaps even early evening. Mr. Trépanier was in his office. He called to me in that distinct voice of his: "Martin, come help me, please—come into my office." So I went into his office, and it was odd because I couldn't see where he was. He said: "Close the door." I closed the door. "Close the blinds." I closed the blinds. And then I realized that Mr. Trépanier was behind his desk, kneeling down in front of his safe.

GALLANT: How big was this safe?

DUMONT: Rather big—I'd say at least two feet high by two feet wide.

GALLANT: So what exactly did you do?

DUMONT: Well, I asked him: "What can I do to help you, Bernard?" And he said: "The door won't close." So I said: "What's wrong? Is there a problem with the lock?" He said: "No. It's too full, you have to help me." And that's when he opened up the safe in question.

GALLANT: And you saw a large sum of cash inside?

DUMONT: To date, I think it is the largest sum

of money I have ever seen in my life. What I remember is not the quantity but the colors. Red, brown, pink.

GALLANT: So there were fifty-dollar bills, hundred-dollar bills, thousand-dollar bills?

DUMONT: Yes. I was rather shocked. Or not really shocked but shaken.

GALLANT: Did you manage to close it?

DUMONT: Mr. Trépanier took out some bills wrapped in rubber bands and put them in his coat. Then, between the two of us, we managed to close the door. I made a little nervous joke to Bernard: "You know, you might need to change the size of your safe." It was just a joke. What I can tell you, however, is that two weeks later, when I went back into Mr. Trépanier's office, he had gotten a new safe.

[Fiction]

#37. GUY BLEEDING ALL OVER SKYPE

By Jonathan Lethem, from "More Little Tales of the Internet," published in Issue 59 of Conjunctions. Lethem is the author of many books, including, most recently, Fear of Music. His "Radisson Confidential" appeared in the October 2011 issue of Harper's Magazine.

He was a guy who was very much a big deal to see, in a kind of you-don't-see-him-very-often way, as well as in a then-when-you-do-he's-on-Skype kind of way. By reputation, not a guy who'd been leaving his house very often of late. Behind him was a marble mantelpiece with two flowerpots framing a mirror. In the mirror we could catch sight of the top of the back of his head but the angle wasn't such that we could see more, say the table or desk where his computer sat, which would have set up a possible infinite regress of him, back of head, front of face visible in small Skype window, plus his view, in the larger window, of us all arrayed at the conference table (we'd have been pretty hard to make out in particular, really). No dice. He crowded the frame at an angle down-tilted, so we got about 25 percent forehead and brushed-back hairline and crown, above and around which we only caught glimpses of mantel and flowerpots and mirror, the rest of his features, of course, crowded, receding in perspective below, and then, busy in a small margin, his face, his hands, which entered the frame to worry at a small, round bandage or plaster on the point of his chin, no big

Introducing

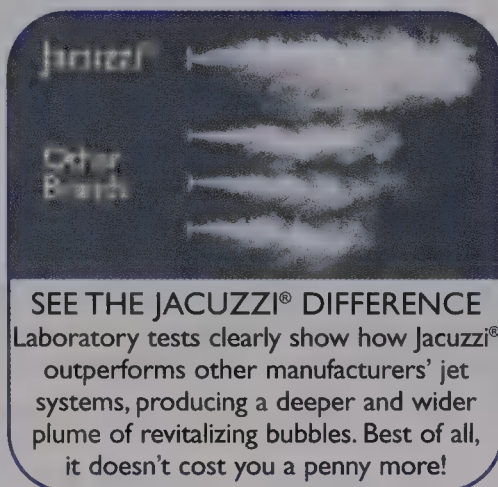
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"Tights 1987–2011," a photograph by Daido Moriyama, whose work was on view in January at Tate Modern, in London.

deal at the outset. We were certainly not fixated on it at the outset, not with the truly and importantly big deal implicit in getting him onto the conference call to begin with. Who ever speaks up in a room like ours packed with colleagues to say to a face on Skype, Hey, you're a little proximate, wanna ease back a tad? If he was too big, let him be too big—he was big. We were small and could see ourselves there: small, arrayed, awaiting. He wasn't calling to have his approach to sitting in front of his computer adjusted by us. We were listeners.

It was maybe five minutes into what he was saying that the circular bandage or plastic kind of seemed to come off with his rubbing and worrying at it, likely the fault of his enthused declamation that his hands couldn't keep still from their nervous action of scaling and itching around the perimeter of the thing—and that he couldn't stop to notice. He sort of brushed it aside completely with the next reach-in from the bottom frame of the shot, and that was when the welling blood I guess first got smeared sideways a little. You could have taken it in the weird lighting and bad resolution for a black smear of interference, a breakdown in the image smoothing, but the earlier presence of the ban-

dage or plaster cued us to the fact it was blood right away. Cued me, at least. I can't actually speak for anyone else there at that table. It's not like we were comparing notes. Maybe at that very first moment one of us might have been able to interject something, but we were hamstrung by our own numbers. Who'd want to be the one to pipe up in a room like that, plus anyway maybe he'd catch it himself with the aid of the little window showing him his own image nested inside of ours (though he'd hardly used that feedback to adjust his distance from the camera, had he?). Maybe, anyway, it wouldn't get any worse, though the fast rate at which the blood had first welled up could have put a rest to any hopes along those lines. It got a whole lot worse.

They say every one of us touches his or her face an average of seven times per minute or something like that and I guess this must have some basis because it wasn't long before he'd gone in again, and again after that. Of course some cool trickle must have alerted him at a semiconscious level but he was also completely caught up in his presentation, he was a guy who came out of a sales background to begin with and had now been in more of a development line for a while,

had dropped from public view for a secret developmental period, during which apparently a certain sales imperative had been bottled up behind his covert man-of-mystery persona, and now that he had our ears he was pitching his only fractionally disclosable new product with everything he had. A talker who rarely got to talk anymore—my impression, for what it is worth. What stood out apart from the spread of the blood was a certain tic in his otherwise fairly brilliant presentation where he'd come to a perfectly apt word, *omniscient*, say, or *compliance*, or *ambient*, and then he'd pause and frame it, as though he wasn't certain he hadn't invented the word himself. "The product has a certain omniscient—*omniscient*, is that even a word?" Or "*Ambient*—is that even a word?" As though in his years of woodshedding secretly to develop the new line he'd forgotten which parts of the world he'd left behind were and weren't projections of his own brain. So there was that tic—"Ubiquity, is that even a word?"—that, and the blood now smearing everywhere, daubs on his forehead and on the tip of his nose, as he quite unfortunately under the circumstances turned out to be one of those persons who enact thoughtful reflection by stroking the forehead or tugging on the nose's tip. Several of his fingers, for those moments they entered the frame, seemed pretty much to be just like a kindergartner's finger-painting implements by now, I mean, bloodied to that extent. None of us said anything. We'd gone from thinking it was no big deal to admiring him for toughing it out—here's the sort of thing, we thought for an instant, that separates guys like this guy from guys like us who sit wondering if it's even a breach of protocol to reach for the bottles of water they've placed before us around the conference table—to realizing something should have been said quite a while before. His fingers were likely getting tacky with blood—the best hope would be for it to dry somewhat and alert him with its adhesion to some dry surface—but instead he went back again and again to the well of his chin and soon had slickly painted himself to the point of resembling one of those crazy guys you see in the stands at a football game. God help you, ending up in a seat beside guys like that. It was at this point that he seemed to become self-conscious of something, not what he should have been, I guess, or he'd likely have said something, but instead he maybe had an impulse to modulate his distance from the camera at last, and so reached out, the blood-black fingers growing abruptly huge and blurred, as when in underwater photography a shark's nose investigates a diver's lens, and then we found the whole screen obliterated in what I can only suppose was a single fingerprint. The guy bleeding all over Skype just went on talking.

[Guide]

HIGH-LOW, HIGH-LOW

From Getting Started with Dwarf Fortress: Learn to Play the Most Complex Video Game Ever Made, by Peter Tyson, published last year by O'Reilly Media, Inc.

When a "strange mood" strikes, a dwarf will stop whatever they are doing and rush to a workshop, their heads filled with an idea for a legendary artifact that they would like to construct. If the dwarf is able to successfully complete the artifact, they will often become legendary in the associated skill, gain a happy thought, and your fortress will have a valuable artifact to use and admire.

It is highly likely that at some point along the route from strange mood to artifact, something will go horribly wrong and you will end up with a dwarf camped out in a workshop doing nothing but flashing "!" impatiently. This is a problem: while in a strange mood, a dwarf won't eat, drink or sleep. He will eventually go insane and may even start randomly attacking nearby dwarves.

Dwarves can form grudges against other dwarves, and having to talk to a dwarf they have a grudge against causes an unhappy thought. Caution: "miasma" is a buildup of stench and gas from rotting or spoiled plant or animal material. Dwarves encountering miasma will experience an unhappy thought.

"Tantrum spirals" usually start when one dwarf snaps and starts a fight with another dwarf, either killing that dwarf or being killed in self-defense. The death of a popular dwarf (or worse, two popular dwarves) will result in a flood of unhappy thoughts through the heads of many fortress dwarves.

Try and reduce these common causes of unhappy thoughts: hunger and thirst; encountering miasma; not enough chairs in the dining room; accidentally murdering a friend while in a strange mood; encountering ghosts; seeing another dwarf die; sustaining injuries; having no clothes.

Dwarves who are forced to drink water get unhappy thoughts and work slower than happy, alcohol-fueled dwarves. Brewing ten stacks of alcohol will keep your dwarves happy for a month or two.

It is inevitable that you will lose a few dwarves as you walk the path to greatness. What you do with the dead dwarves you accrue is quite important to

the health and well-being of your fortress. There are three reasons for this. Firstly, rotting dwarf bodies lying around your fortress tend to make living dwarves somewhat distressed. Secondly, rotting bodies cause miasma. Finally, dead dwarves who aren't appropriately respected by their surviving brethren will come back as ghosts and haunt your fortress. We can avoid these problems by building coffins at a Mason's Workshop in which to place our dead dwarves, and installing the coffins somewhere convenient. Once this is done, you will probably also want to toggle "Allow Pets" to "(N)" so that your coffins aren't filled with dead cats.

[Anthropology]

POLITE BRIGADE

From A Brochure for Comprehending the Cultures of the Coalition Forces, a twenty-eight-page pamphlet published by the Afghan Ministry of Defense and distributed to Afghan troops. Translated from the Dari by Noorullah Dawari.

When members of the coalition forces are getting excited, they show their feelings by touching another person's shoulder. They may do the same to you too, for doing a good job. If you are insulted by that, ask them not to do such a thing in the future.

Most of the members of the coalition forces are interested in sharing photos and stories about their wives, children, brothers, and sisters with their friends, so they may ask you about your family members, including females. They just want to have a very friendly relationship with you.

As you all know, Afghans do not blow their noses in front of other people in personal meetings, but in the cultures of the coalition forces' countries, this is a very normal thing.

You know that in Afghan culture putting your feet toward someone is considered an offensive act, but in the culture of most coalition forces' countries, this is not considered offensive. In fact, when a member of the coalition forces wants to feel comfortable around you while talking, he might put his feet on his desk. He doesn't mean to insult you at all. He either doesn't know anything about Afghan culture or he has forgotten.

[Conversation]

OUTSIDE OVER THERE

From an interview with children's book author and illustrator Maurice Sendak, by British journalist Emma Brockes, published in the November/December 2012 issue of The Believer. Sendak, whose many works include Where the Wild Things Are and In the Night Kitchen, died in Connecticut last May.

EMMA BROCKES: Do you miss the city, living out here?

MAURICE SENDAK: I really don't like the city anymore. You get pushed and harassed and people grope you. It's too tumultuous. It's too crazy. I'm afraid of falling over in New York. People are all insane and talking on machines and twittering and twottering. All that. I'm here looking for peace and quiet. A yummy death.

BROCKES: A yummy death?

SEDAK: I'm just reading a book about Samuel Palmer and the ancients in England in the 1820s. You were so lucky to have William Blake. He's lying in bed, he's dying, and all the young men come—the famous engravers and painters—and he's lying and dying, and suddenly he jumps up and begins to sing! "Angels! Angels!" I don't know what the song was. And he died a happy death. It can be done. If you're William Blake and totally crazy.

BROCKES: You do some teaching out here?

SEDAK: I have a fellowship that started last year, two men and two women living in a house, and I go over when they want me to critique or whatever the hell. I just talk dirty. They're nice people. Young. It's probably not very original, but old artists like to have young artists around ... to destroy. I'm joking. I really want to help them. But publishing is such an outrageously stupid profession. Or has become so.

BROCKES: More so than it was?

SEDAK: Well, nobody knows what they're doing. I wonder if that's always been true. I think being old is very fortunate right now. I want to get out of this as soon as possible. It's terrible. And the great days in the 1950s and after the war, when publishing children's books was youthful and fun ... it really was. It's not just looking back and pretending that it was good. It was good. And now it's just stupid.

BROCKES: Why?

SEDAK: Because of Rupert Murdoch. His name should be what everything is called now.



Det fysiska och det psykiska (The Physical and the Mental), a drawing by Fredrik Hofwander, whose work was on view in June at Stene Projects, in Stockholm.

BROCKES: But he publishes you!

SENDAK: Yes! HarperCollins. He owns Harper.

I guess the rest of the world, too. He represents how bad things have become.

BROCKES: Have you thought of leaving?

SENDAK: Oh, sure. But I don't know a better house. They're all terrible.

BROCKES: What do you think of e-books?

SENDAK: I hate them. It's like making believe there's another kind of sex. There isn't another kind of sex. There isn't another kind of book. A book is a book is a book. I know that's terribly old-fashioned. I'm old, and when I'm gone they'll probably try to make my books on all these things, but I'm going to fight it like hell. I can't believe I've turned into a typical old man. I can't believe it. I was young just minutes ago.

BROCKES: Is the problem with e-books partly a problem of color?

SENDAK: Yes. Picture books depend on color,

largely. And they haven't perfected the color in those machines. But it's not that. It's giving up a form that is so beautiful. A book is really like a lover. It arranges itself in your life in a way that is beautiful. Even as a kid, my sister, who was the eldest, brought books home for me, and I think I spent more time sniffing and touching them than reading. I just remember the joy of the book, the beauty of the binding. The smelling of the interior. Happy.

BROCKES: Are you happy now?

SENDAK: My friends are all dying. They have to die. I know that. I have to die. But two friends died last week. I was completely broken by it. One was a publisher in Zurich. I loved him and his wife. It's the loneliness that's very bad. They're doing what is natural. If I was doing what was natural I would be gone, like they are. I just miss them, terribly.

[Correspondence]

ALPHABET CITIES

From Here and Now, a collection of letters exchanged by novelists J. M. Coetzee and Paul Auster between 2008 and 2011, out this month from Viking.

24 AUGUST 2009

Dear Paul,

I have been thinking about names, about their fittingness or unfittingness. I would guess that names interest you, too, if only because of having to find good, "right" names for your imaginary persons. Neither of us seems to go in for calling characters A or B or Pim or Bom.

I was brought up within the linguistic orthodoxy that the signifier is arbitrary, though for mysterious reasons the signifiers of one language won't work as signifiers in another language ("Help me, I am dying of thirst!" will get you nowhere in Mongolia). This is supposed to be doubly true of proper names: whether a street is named Marigold Street or Mandragora Street or indeed 55th Street is supposed to make no difference (no practical difference).

In the realm of poetry (in the widest sense) the doctrine of the arbitrariness of the signifier has never won much credence. In poetry the connotations of words—the accumulations of cultural significance around them—matter. "Mandragora," via Keats, calls up bliss and death. "55th Street," which at first sight seems anonymous, turns out to connote anonymity.

Through a supreme act of poetic power, Kafka has given a letter of the alphabet allusive force. Roberto Calasso's recent book is called simply *K*. We look at the jacket and we know what it will be about. I once called a character K (Michael K) as a stroke to reclaim the letter of the alphabet that Kafka had annexed, but didn't have much success.

Few of us write novels, but most of us, one way or another, end up producing offspring, and are then compelled by law to give our offspring names. There are parents who accept this duty with joy, and parents who accept it with misgiving. There are parents who feel free to make up a name as they choose, and parents constrained (by law, by custom, by anxiety) to choose a name from a list.

Parents with misgivings try to give the child a neutral name, a name without connotations, a name that will not embarrass it in later life. Thus: Enid. But there is a catch. Name too many daughters Enid, and the name Enid comes to signify the kind of child whose parents reacted with misgiving to the duty of naming a child and thus gave their girl child as anonymous a name as they could. So "Enid" becomes a kind of fatality awaiting the child as she grows up: diffidence, caution, reserve.

Or someone far away, someone you have never heard of, disgraces your name. You grow up in the Midwest of the United States, and everything is fine until one day someone asks you, "Are you by any chance related to Adolf Hitler?" and you have to change your name to Hilter or Hiller or Smith.

Your name is your destiny. Oidipous, Swollen-foot. The only trouble is, your name speaks your destiny only in the way the Delphic Sibyl does: in the form of a riddle. Only as you lie on your death-bed do you realize what it meant to be "Tamerlane" or "John Smith" or "K." A Borgesian revelation.

All the best,
John

AUGUST 29, 2009

Dear John:

First, allow me to pounce on 55th Street—"which turns out to connote anonymity." For the sake of argument, let us assume that the 55th Street in question happens to be located in New York, the borough of Manhattan to be precise, East Side or West Side not indicated, but Midtown Manhattan for all that, and then anyone who lives in this city will be able to conjure up vivid mental pictures and a flood of personal memories about that street whose name is not a word but an anonymous number. You write "55th Street," and I immediately think about the Saint Regis Hotel and an erotic encounter I had there when I was young, about taking the French writer Edmond Jabès and his wife there for tea one afternoon and seeing Arthur Ashe enter the room in his tennis whites, about lunching there with Vanessa Redgrave and discussing the role she was about to play in my film, *Lulu on the Bridge*. The numbers tell stories, and behind the blank wall of their anonymity they are just as alive and evocative as the Elysian Fields of Paris. Mention to a New Yorker the following streets, and his mind will swarm with images: 4th Street (Greenwich Village), 14th Street (the cheapest stores in the city), 34th Street (Herald Square, Macy's, illuminated Christmas decorations), 42nd Street (Times Square, "legitimate" theaters, "Give My Regards to Broadway"), 59th Street (the Plaza Hotel and the grand entrance to Central Park), 125th Street (Harlem, the Apollo Theater, Duke Ellington's song about the A train). Just two blocks up from 55th Street, on West 57th, there is the building in which my grandfather used to have his office (intense childhood memories of going in there and being allowed to play with the typewriters and adding machines), which happens to be the same building that for many years housed *The New York Review of Books* (intense memories from early adulthood of sitting with Bob Silvers as we discussed the pieces I had written for him)—so that the mere mention of 57th Street will summon forth for me

an entire archaeology of my past, memories layered on top of other memories, the primordial dig.

Just the other day, when Siri and I returned from Nantucket (that is, before I had read your letter), the taxi driver from the airport took a shortcut through a Brooklyn neighborhood I was not familiar with, and as we rode down Ocean Parkway, we traversed cross streets named after the letters of the alphabet, from Avenue Z to Avenue A, and I remember thinking that none of this meant anything to me, that unlike the Avenue A in Manhattan (the East Village), which I know and therefore have a personal connection to, the Avenue A in Brooklyn is a complete cipher. I found myself pondering how boring it would be to live on a street named Avenue L. On the other hand, I also thought: Avenue K wouldn't be bad (for all the reasons you mention), and other interesting or tolerable letters would be O, X, and Z—the nothing, the unknown, and the end. Then I walked into the house, which is also on a street designated by a number, and read your fax about K and 55th Street. Perfect timing.

The first book published by George Oppen, the American poet I am so fond of, was called *Discrete Series* (circa 1930)—a mathematical term, as I'm sure you know, and the example Oppen always gave to describe a discrete series was this: 4, 14, 23, 34, 42, 59, 66, 72 ... at first glance a meaningless collection of numbers, but when you learn that those numbers are in fact the station stops along the IRT subway line in Manhattan, they take on the force of lived experience. Arbitrary, yes, but at the same time not meaningless.

Many years ago, when I wrote my novel *Ghosts*, I gave all the characters the names of colors. Yes, I wanted to give the story an abstract, fable-like quality, but at the same time I was also thinking about the irreducibility of colors, and that the only way we can know and understand what colors are is to experience them, that to describe blue or green to a blind man is something beyond the power of language, and that just as colors are irreducible and indescribable, so, too, are people.

We grow into the names we are given, we test them out, we grapple with them until we come to accept that we are the names we bear. Can you remember practicing your signature as a young boy? Not long after they learn how to write in longhand, most children spend hours filling up pieces of paper with their names. It is not an empty pursuit. It is an attempt, I feel, to convince ourselves that we and our names are one, to take on an identity in the eyes of the world.

In some cultures, people are given new names after reaching puberty and at times even given a third name after committing a great or ignominious deed in adulthood.

Some people, of course, are saddled with atrocious names, deeply unfortunate names. The most

pathetic one I have ever run across belonged to a man who married a distant relative of mine: Elmer Deutlebaum. Imagine walking through life as Elmer Deutlebaum.

My Canadian-born grandfather, the son of Polish-Jewish immigrants, out of some incomprehensible loyalty to the British crown, named my mother Queenie. It took her many years to grow into that one. When she was eight or nine, after years of teasing from her classmates, she decided to change it to Estelle.

Needless to say, I have spent my whole life meditating on my own name, and my great hope is to be reborn as an American Indian. Paul: Latin for "small, little." Auster: Latin for "South Wind." South Wind: an old American euphemism for a rectal toot. I therefore shall return to this world bearing the proud and altogether appropriate name of Little Fart.

Write again soon.
Yours ever,
Paul

[Marketing]

THE HIGHBRANDER

From an October 9, 2012, email sent by Lucy Bird, then chief executive of Marketing Edinburgh, to city councillors Sue Brice and Alastair Maclean, during the development of an ad campaign to promote the city. Bird resigned in December because of the poor public reception of one proposed campaign slogan, "Incredinburgh."

Dear Sue and Alastair:

The compromise position we agreed to at our meeting on September 28 has, as most compromise positions do, left us with challenges. We agreed that "goahedinburgh" was likely to be the best possible compromise. I'd not seek to change that position had our further research not uncovered:

—If you google "goahedinburgh" (without an "a"), you are returned a lot of cheap flights from Edinburgh to Goa.

—If you google "goaheadinburgh" (with an "a"), you get "goth edinburgh" or "go ape edinburgh."

Our best solution would be to use "winterin-edinburgh" and #edinburgh. These enable us to follow the lines of the TV and radio advertising, which for winter sign off with "So goahedinburgh. Spend winter in Edinburgh."

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BAKKEN BUSINESS

The price of North Dakota's fracking boom

By Richard Manning



The prairie reveals. Any hilltop's field of vision opens to evidence of energy and motion, fresh tracks, today mostly tire tracks of the present, but also old tracks through time. I

Richard Manning's ninth book, It Runs in the Family, will be published this year by St. Martin's Press. His last article for Harper's Magazine, "The Oil We Eat," appeared in the February 2004 issue.

have come to North Dakota to single out a particular and peculiar set of tracks—hoofprints, really—for what they tell us about our destruction of the natural world.

Theodore Roosevelt arrived in the town of Little Missouri, in the center of the Dakota Territory, in 1883, in his early twenties, then all buckskin, bluster, teeth, and glasses. He came first of

all to kill animals and then to write about it. But Roosevelt was already an accomplished naturalist and convinced Darwinist, and he came also to see the raw nature then on display in the Badlands, a stark landscape of eroded clay and red scoria in the southwest corner of what is now North Dakota, a bit of geologic chaos that serves as counterpoint to the gentle prairie all around.



The year that followed was disastrous for Roosevelt. On Valentine's Day 1884, his mother, Mittie, and his young blue-blood wife, Alice Lee, herself recently a mother, died in the same house on West 57th Street in Manhattan. That summer, at the Republican National Convention in Chicago, he suffered a professional setback to go with his personal catastrophe when his preferred candidate was kept off the ticket. Instead of heading home from the convention, Roosevelt took a train straight from Chicago back to the Badlands, this time intending to stay a while. He bought a ranch, which he named the Elkhorn. Roosevelt wrote volumes about the Badlands, but never about what settled his grief while he was there. In any case, when he returned to New York and to politics, in 1886, he was transformed.

Before heading west, Roosevelt had already made a name for himself as viscerally and implacably opposed to corruption, taking on Tammany Hall in the New York legislature, laying the foundation of what would

become a career of trust-busting that closed the Gilded Age and eventually broke up John D. Rockefeller's megamonopoly, Standard Oil. But at the Elkhorn he learned a deep engagement with the landscape, a love of the wild, and he reinforced an obsession with the strenuous that would take him through life. His character formed. What happened there propelled Roosevelt almost single-handedly to found the American conservation movement, leading one Roosevelt scholar to call the Elkhorn the "cradle of conservation."

As president, Roosevelt would call monopolists like Rockefeller "the most dangerous members of the criminal class—the criminals of great wealth." The grit of this excoriation may perhaps have come from the Elkhorn, but certainly it came from no place modern political leaders have been. Today, the Elkhorn is home to at least five active oil wells run by men in John D. Rockefeller's line of work.

Asked to rank American oil-producing states in order of produc-

tivity, most of us would begin with Texas and Alaska. Some might think to add California. Until very recently, that was correct. But North Dakota surpassed California in December 2011 and Alaska the following March. Production in the state has quadrupled in less than a decade. At this rate, it will surpass Texas in another decade, around the time the United States surpasses Saudi Arabia as the world's leader in oil production. All of this will be thanks to lessons learned extracting oil from the Bakken formation, which happens to include Roosevelt's ranch.

The Bakken is a massive bed of rock in three layers: dark ones on top and bottom and a lighter one sandwiched between, the middle layer's pores richly endowed with oil—light tight crude. The image of the Oreo cookie, often invoked to describe the Bakken, captures its uniformity of structure and its color scheme but fails miserably to describe the obduracy and scale of this 25,000-square-mile slab, which is in places up to one hundred feet thick. It sits two miles below the surface—



mostly in western North Dakota but also extending into eastern Montana and the southern edges of Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

Geologists have long known there is oil beneath the northern Great Plains—the formation got its name in the 1950s from the farmer who owned the site of the first producing well. But for almost half a century, the region’s few wells were thought to draw from isolated pools. Shortly before his death in 2000, a United States Geological Survey scientist named Leigh Price circulated a paper concluding that the Bakken was a single deposit that held 413 billion barrels of oil. Price’s methods remained contested for some years, but even conservative estimates now put the Bakken’s holdings above 100 billion barrels. (By comparison, current “proved reserves”—the known amount of oil that can be economically extracted with current technology—for the entire United States are 23 billion barrels.) Around the time Price first outlined the true scope of the Bakken fields, refinements in extraction techniques suggested how to make them pay.

Hydraulic fracturing—now widely referred to in shorthand as “fracking”—uses water treated with chemicals to break apart rock formations. Oil and gas have long been coaxed from fissures, gaps, and cracks in rocks; fracking is simply a way to artificially induce more cracks (some of them more than half a mile long) by filling a bore hole with water, pressurizing it to as much as 8,000 pounds per square inch to split the rock, and forcing coarse material like sand and ceramic in to keep the new clefts open, thereby allowing them to produce for decades.

Fracking was developed in Texas in the late 1940s, but this technique alone would not have been enough to unleash the full potential of the Bakken. All the formation’s oil was tied up in a thin layer of rock, a puny target when viewed down a narrow vertical well, but plenty big if approached horizontally. A 2005 breakthrough in directional drilling finally gave oilmen the ability to bore two miles down to the oil-laden white layer of the Oreo, then send a second, flexible drill to bend the well before drilling another two miles horizontally. But

even after this development, it took a 2009 innovation called multistage fracking to make the oil flow profitably. Bit by bit, the oilmen learned that the rocks yielded best when drill operators sent rubber-coated plugs into the hole at thousand-foot increments, expanded those plugs to block the hole, fracked, then moved the plugs down the line to frack again, a sequence they repeated dozens of times. The process takes about a week, sucks down as many as 3 million gallons of water from 400 or so tanker-truck loads, and requires the assembly of a small army of supply and pumper trucks at each wellhead.

Here is the revolutionary discovery of the Bakken, a discovery that threatens to replay in vast, currently untapped oil-shale deposits in North America and worldwide: It no longer matters where an oilman drills a well. What matters is what he does in the hole once it is drilled.

To the north of Watford City, an hour’s drive from Roosevelt’s former ranch, is the nucleus of what was once a prairie farm town, but it has



been swallowed in a highway sprawl of workers' camps, truck yards, pipe yards, fuel stations, machine shops, dust, and gravel. An oil-industry spokeswoman in Bismarck acknowledged the effect of the boom to me the day before I visited Watford, but added that I should report the people there were living in a "progress zone."

This isn't the kind of language one hears from Gene Veeder, the county's director of economic development, who is not simply a glad-handing booster of commerce but a thoughtful, genial guy with a guitar case propped in the corner of his office. He started on this job nineteen years ago, when it was much like being the economic-development director in any small town in the Great Plains, a region that has been losing rural population since 1909.

"Now I meet more people in a week here than I met in twenty years," he says. Before, his job was simply impossible; now it is something like being charged with ensuring that the wind blows.

Veeder is open enough about the downsides of the oil boom: "It did

bring the world outside into the community, and that was an eye-opener," he says. "People are just overwhelmed with the drugs and prostitution and fights and all the things that come with oil fields."

He tries to get to know some of the men, a few with families, arriving in the unbroken string of pickup trucks, and he finds they bear news from the Rust Belt, the logging towns of the Northwest, the housing-busted South. He hears again and again from men coming to start their first jobs in years: truck drivers, electricians, carpenters, equipment operators—men who were raised to expect that if they worked they would get paid, who for a long time and in a lot of places in this country found that to be untrue but are now finding it true in Watford. Difficult to imagine the politician who will now stand between these men and their oil-field paychecks.

Veeder was born and raised nearby, on his father's 3,000-acre ranch, which he now owns along with the knowledge that no one can run a

ranch that small in western North Dakota and make it pencil. He did not get rich in the oil boom. His ranch is typical in having been cobbled together bit by bit from smaller farms of homesteaders busted in the Dust Bowl. Many of those people had already sold off their mineral rights, so these days decisions about whether to lease to prospectors are often made not by those who own and occupy the land but by shirttail relatives and descendants who never saw the farms. Veeder himself retains mineral rights on about 10 percent of the acreage of his ranch, a proportion he says is typical.

"I'm looking at oil wells right now from my house, and if I had 'em, well my God," he says. Nevertheless, his daughters, who had moved away to begin lives elsewhere, have moved back. One son-in-law works at Marathon, the other at Halliburton, senior-level people. "They are building new houses right now," he says. "That's something nobody talks about, but one [daughter] is living on the ranch, and she could not live on the ranch without oil."



“For me personally, having the ranch out there, I wish [the oil boom] would have never been here. Okay. But I do remember when my last child left home, and she was never coming back,” he says. “Now I get to live the rest of my life the way I want to.”

This is not to say that out-migration has ceased; it has simply shifted demographics. Longtime residents are leaving, sick of the clutter, noise, and crime and pushed by the fact that free-and-clear houses are worth five, six, seven times what they were a few years ago.

The popular mythology of oil leans heavily on the figure of the wildcatter, the man who takes on undeniable risk and wins megabuck rewards as he pioneers the world’s great deposits of petroleum. There are no wildcatters in the Bakken, not now. Every single well drilled in the area has a 99 percent chance of producing oil for about thirty years in predictable and tapering amounts. Wells drilled into the proven area generally enter the black when oil is above fifty or sixty dollars a barrel,

which it has been for most of the past eight years. This is no longer wildcatting; this is plumbing. The odds of success are set in stone.

There are 8,025 producing oil wells in North Dakota. Their density and layout form a haphazard pattern so far determined by the caprice of the market, offering little idea of what shape development will take in the future. What one sees is not so much production as flags and stakes claiming territory. Almost all of this landscape is privately held as ranches and farms, meaning that the 2,000 new wells to be added this year could require nearly as many separate leases. The technical breakthroughs since 2005 have yielded a rush of three-year exploration deals. Drillers generally must complete a producing well within this period to extend the lease. Then they can go back and drill as many wells as necessary to get all the recoverable oil.

Every Bakken well produces natural gas in addition to crude oil, but there is insufficient infrastructure—pipelines and processing plants—to handle it. Natural gas’s current low

price undermines the incentive to build this infrastructure, and anyway there is no time to wait, given the competitiveness of oil extraction. About a third of the natural gas now flowing from the Bakken, enough to heat half a million homes each day, is set alight at the well-head, producing a landscape of flames in robust competition with the stars. Recent nighttime satellite imagery of the plains between Minnesota and Montana shows two big sprays of light on the ground below: one is formed by the urban area around Minneapolis–Saint Paul, the other by Bakken gas flares around Williston, North Dakota.

The future promises to be even brighter. The optimum spacing for wells is something like one every two or three square miles. The oil in the stone slab below does not move or vary considerably in distribution, so grab a map and start sticking it with pins. Make a grid that roughly replicates the property survey first imposed on this landscape with white settlement. People have done the math; fully developed, plumbed,

and producing, the Bakken will support between 35,000 and 45,000 profitable oil wells, at least seven times the current number.

Even the trivial effects seem not so trivial in multiplication. During the first year of a well's life—the hustling year of drilling, plugging, and fracking—it will require 2,000 truck trips. The beat-up two-lanes and gravel or red-scoria section-line roads that thread between wells handle at least 4 million trips a year. Farmers and ranchers who live on these back roads no longer open windows in summer because of the dust. The usual roadside litter is now dependably punctuated with “trucker bombs”—spent plastic soda bottles filled with urine—rest stops on the prairie being few and far between.

Trucks need drivers; roads need builders; fleets need mechanics; men need houses, which need carpenters; rigs need workers; the hundreds of new companies in the Bakken need accountants, flacks, lobbyists, surveyors, negotiators, paymasters; and all these need Walmarts, Holiday Inn Expresses, ATV dealerships, gun shops, strip clubs, and greasy spoons. What reaches the outside world is the bottom line: North Dakota has the lowest unemployment rate in the nation. The oil companies cannot deploy workers or build rigs fast

the national rate. The sanitation department in Dickinson, a city of 23,000 whose population is expected to double in seven years, cannot retain its employees, many of whom are licensed truck drivers and have been recruited literally right out of the cabs of their garbage trucks by the oil companies. Skilled workers of any level easily make six figures.

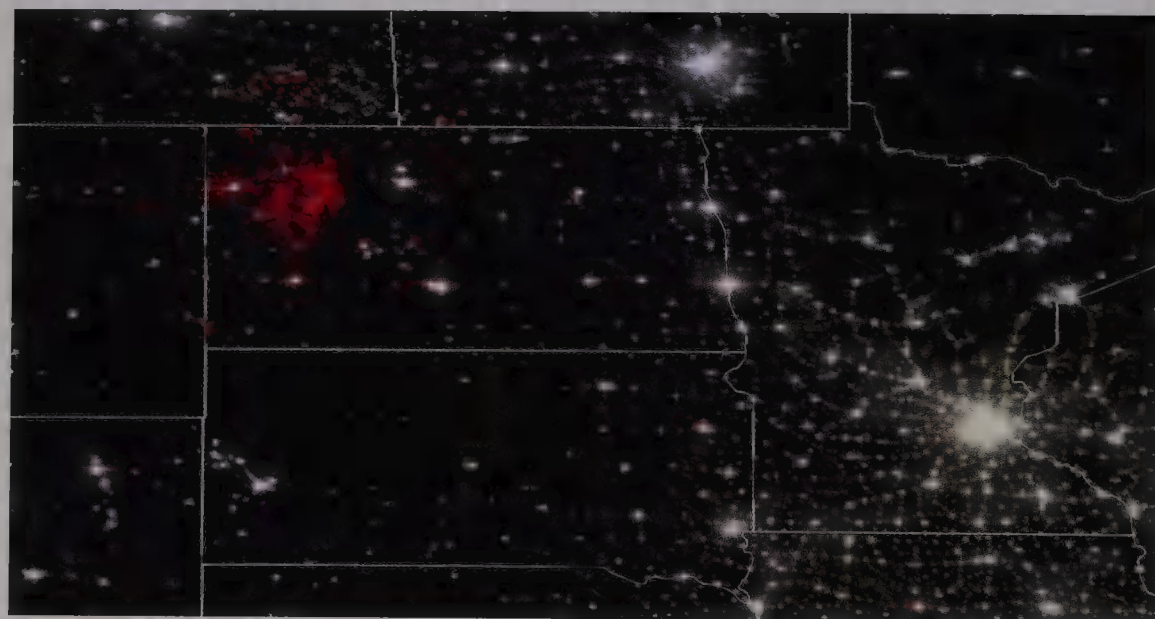
The evidence of this growing labor force is more apparent on the land than are the wells themselves. Williston, which in the 2010 census was recorded as having fewer than 15,000 people, built a total of 166 houses and apartments in 2009; this year, planners expect to build about 2,300. Watford City was a wide-spot-in-the-road village of 1,700 people three years ago. No one knows the population today, but the best guess is 7,000 and growing. All of the towns are ringed by “man camps,” the local term of art for barracks-like installations of trailers and modular homes that can hold upward of a thousand workers. Companies add housing in chunks, taking some effort to provide the best, since desirable quarters serve as recruiting tools.

Newcomers lacking company housing live in trailers and RV parks, or, failing that, in clutches in parking lots at the ragged edges of

cars. In February of last year, the Williston Walmart reversed its longstanding policy of allowing campers to squat in its parking lot. This, by the way, is the same Walmart where Michael Spell and Lester Waters, having come to the Bakken from Colorado in search of oil work, bought a shovel (which they returned for a refund three days later) to bury the body of Sherry Arnold, a schoolteacher from Sidney, Montana, they allegedly killed while on a crack binge. Besides traffic, people here talk about the crush of population growth, by which they mean outsiders; the capstone of this discussion is Arnold. It isn't simply talk: in the months after the murder, newspapers in the region reported an increase in sales of handguns and pepper spray in this place where less than a decade ago no one locked doors. In January, the *New York Times* noted a spike in sexual assaults in Williston, where single men outnumber single women almost two to one. Pharmacies there have been held up for prescription painkillers, OxyContin being a favorite. Last summer, a group of enterprising Korean women began running a prostitution ring from an RV in Bainville, Montana, a hamlet once dominated by the white steeple of a clapboard church, now by an oil derrick.

All this is entirely in keeping with the historical record. These towns are, after all, boomtowns, specifically oil boomtowns. The industry began in western Pennsylvania just before the Civil War. One early example was the aptly named Pithole Creek. “The whole place,” a visitor wrote, “smells like a corps of soldiers when they have the diarrhoea.” Reported *The Nation*, “It is safe to assert that there is more vile liquor drunk in this town than in any of its size in the world.”

“Our quality of life is gone,” a county commissioner named Dan Kalil testified last January to the North Dakota legislature's Energy Development Committee. “It is absolutely gone. My community is gone, and I'm heart-



enough to get the job done. The Walmart in Williston offers seventeen dollars an hour to start, twice

towns or on plots leased out by farmers at prices far above the market yield of wheat. Many live in



broken. I never wanted to live anyplace but Williston, North Dakota, and now I don't know what I'm going to do."

Mike McEnroe is a biologist retired from a career in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He remains active in the North Dakota Wildlife Society, a chapter of an international group that traces its roots directly to the early-twentieth-century environmentalist Aldo Leopold and indirectly to the circle of New York patricians and scientists a young Theodore Roosevelt recruited to serve in the country's nascent conservation movement. In early 2011, the chapter gathered for its annual meeting, usually a mostly social event; but talk soon turned to the Bakken, beginning, as these things do, with some problems concerning wetlands and an obscure little bird, the piping plover.

A delegation was got up to go have a look. McEnroe says he envisioned packing clubs and coolers of beer in the trunk and spending a few fine days in prairie country alternating be-

tween rounds of golf and tours of wetlands. The visit, however, coincided with the summer melt, which followed two winters of significant snowfall. The Little Missouri and Missouri Rivers were in full flood.

The recent national opposition to the Keystone XL—an extension of the pipeline system currently delivering oil from the Canadian tar sands to the United States—rallied around the possibility of spills of crude in Nebraska's Sandhills. There were at least 1,100 spills in North Dakota's stretch of the Bakken during 2011. We don't know much about the nature of each of these, but McEnroe's group saw something of the scope of the problem in touring a few dozen of the Bakken's nearly 5,000 wells.

At one site, the group counted nine active oil wells, all of them flooded with Missouri River Basin water. The oil company in charge of the site had had to pump its oil-storage tanks full of water to prevent them from floating away. Each active drilling site has a "reserve pit," a swimming-pool-size hole adjacent to the rig that catches what workers call

"cuttings"—the rock dust produced by drilling—as well as salt water and frack water and chemicals pumped back out of the hole along with the first few barrels of crude. State regulators do not keep track of this mixture, but one landowner in Stanley, North Dakota, did, sending a sample of reserve-pit soil and water to a lab. It contained benzene, toluene, and xylene (all suspected carcinogens), along with diesel fuel.

McEnroe's group arrived at one site two months after spring floods had sent reserve-pit water into the Missouri. They found the berm designed to prevent runoff still breached. Biologists reported streams with layers of belly-up fish floating near the surface downstream from wells. The pathways of previous drainages were marked by a sort of scorched earth: dead vegetation, killed by effluent. They shot photographs, wrote a report, and sent it off to the state in December 2011. McEnroe says they haven't heard much back.

Anne Marguerite Coyle is an eagle biologist, and just before the boom, she tagged eighteen juvenile

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golden eagles as part of a routine monitoring effort. All are now dead or gone. In one case, a drilling rig landed close to one of the eagles' nesting sites, so when that bird disappeared, she asked people nearby what had happened. "Oh, somebody shot that one," they said. Gunplay, the roads, the rigs, the noise, the trucks, the off-duty oil workers on ATVs, the general disregard for anything living that is the consequence of industrializing a once-wild landscape—these make it impossible to pinpoint oil's role in the eagles' fate. But if they weren't killed by oil, they were likely killed by the things oil brings with it.

Coyle reminded me of a biological phenomenon called allelopathy, a devious and successful survival tactic of a number of species of plants that secrete chemicals to alter their environments, making it impossible for other species to inhabit the same places—not killing competitors, but subtly forcing everything else to go away.

Drillers talk about the "recipe," the particular combination of technique and chemicals that makes a particular bed of rock yield its payload. Once we got the Bakken's recipe right, there were no more decisions to be made, save the hundreds or thousands of piecemeal decisions made over kitchen tables when people sign leases. You might hate the idea of oil rigs on the family ranch, but if you don't sell someone else will, and it's all going to hell anyway, so might as well sign. We do not decide whether to drill oil. Price decides. Price and how much is in the ground.

Current extraction methods have placed as many as 24 billion barrels of Bakken oil within reach. But the recipe can still be improved: this number is less than 3 percent of some estimates of the amount of oil in that Oreo. Drillers in some areas report recovering as much as 12 percent of the oil they estimate to be in the rock. Existing technology, which for all intents and purposes has been in use about four years, is now being tinkered with on 5,000 wells. How will all this newfound

ability and knowledge play out across continent and globe? The U.S. Energy Information Administration estimates there are 220 billion barrels of shale oil now technically recoverable in the United States, nearly ten times current proved reserves.

Fracking of the Marcellus formation in the Northeast has met some resistance—partly because the formation yields natural gas, which is harder to contain than liquid oil, but mostly because the greatest force of environmentalism—"not in my backyard"—is in full rage in a region that has not only actual back yards but also major media markets. The Bakken, meanwhile, has developed as it has without so much as creasing the nation's political discussion.

With this lesson in hand, how about Wolfcamp in Texas, a shale deposit oilmen are now touting as being bigger than the Bakken, part of the much larger Permian Basin? How about the Eagle Ford in South Texas and the Barnett in North Texas? Colorado's Niobrara, Arkansas's Fayetteville, Michigan's Antrim, and the Monterey in California? There are at least twenty active shale plays in the United States. Worldwide? There are major shale deposits in Argentina, Australia, Canada, China, Mexico, and South Africa.

Amid a devastating national recession, North Dakota boasts about its 3 percent unemployment rate and about attracting its kids back home from the Twin Cities with high-paying jobs. Amid catastrophic cutbacks in state governments nationwide, North Dakota socked away a \$1.6 billion budget surplus. The state has led the nation in wage growth since 2009, with an average of 9.3 percent a year. The closest competitor is South Dakota, at 5.1 percent. Meanwhile, the boom is pushing the United States toward energy independence.

"Our dependence on foreign oil is down because of policies put in place by our administration, but also our predecessor's administration," President Obama said last year. "And whoever succeeds me is going to have to keep it up."

In our divisive political world, anything this bipartisan is a done

deal. Obama's statement came during a series of speeches he made last March that included an appearance in Cushing, Oklahoma, where he restated his support for the building of the southern half of the Keystone extension, the construction of the northern half of which his administration tabled in a fight with Republicans in Congress. Obama's support has little to do with delivering Canadian tar-sands oil to refineries in the Gulf and lots to do with the Bakken, which the Keystone would tap at Baker, Montana. The pipeline is designed to relieve a bottleneck caused, in part, by a glut created by increased Bakken production. Current transportation costs elevate gasoline prices elsewhere in the country and lower profits coming back to the Bakken. The lack of a pipeline does not pinch off Bakken oil (or oil from the tar sands, for that matter): the producers ship what they can in one of the region's eight existing pipelines, and the rest ships on trains or trucks. But pipelines are cheaper (and safer, and have a smaller carbon footprint), and a new pipeline could mean, say, twenty-five dollars a barrel on 100,000 barrels a day in the Bakken. Ultimately, the Keystone extension will be built.

Just before the Civil War, with development of the first "rock oil" drills in Pennsylvania, marketers began touting the virtues of kerosene. As one handbook had it:

Those that have not seen it burn, may rest assured its light is no moonshine; but something nearer the clear, strong, brilliant light of day, to which darkness is not party.... [R]ock oil emits a dainty light; the brightest and yet the cheapest in the world; a light fit for Kings and Royalists and not unsuitable for Republicans and Democrats.

This is not ad copy; it is political science. There have been no advances in the field since.

And so we come to the point where the congregation rises and the preacher intones the usual analogy of oil to addiction, but the truth is that oil is no more an addiction than food is. Food and energy are necessi-

ties in all species, and oil is how we handle energy in this life as we know it.

Theodore Roosevelt was a legendary documenter of himself. He detailed every hunting trip he took and sold multiple articles on each, some cut-and-paste jobs of earlier pieces. He hustled freelance assignments, books, and speeches on every set of deer antlers, on every buffalo mount and elk hide, on every lark and thrush he saw. Sometimes he wrote well and philosophically, especially about the odd notion of his that wilderness itself was of value, an irreplaceable force in shaping American character. It is a quaint notion, today as forgotten and antique as his condemnations of John D. Rockefeller.

He did not, however, write about what he learned and felt in this place that allowed him to deal with the death of his mother and young wife. Too bad, because we're down to grief now, and what he learned about it here is what we need to know.

I've had enough of these winter two-lanes, and so find my way to the unpaved scoria of Magpie Road, headed due west from the roar of the highway into the relative quiet of the Badlands. I have a spot in mind just northeast of what was Roosevelt's Elkhorn Ranch. There's a trailhead where I can leave my Jeep. A fine running path wraps around buttes and coulees, leading on for miles, eventually on to Elkhorn Ranch itself. Somewhere Roosevelt's tracks are no doubt set in midlayers of this very trail, just above the deeper layer of moccasin tracks, so I run, because I am a runner, trying now to build the chuff of my breathing loud enough to overmatch the whir and creak of pump jacks every few miles.

It's late February and still plenty cold, despite the sun. I have a decent pair of cleated running shoes made in China and delivered to me by diesel fuel. I have fleece and polyester miracle fabrics that disguise their common origin in petroleum, so I am warm. My Jeep Liberty burned through six and a half tanks of gas in reporting this story. Roosevelt's ranch is within my range, but I stop short. ■

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THE UNRAVELING OF BO XILAI

China loses a populist star

By Lauren Hilgers



When Wang Lijun fled for Chengdu, he evaded guards outside his door who, a few weeks earlier, would have bowed to his authority. He drove quietly out of a city full of policemen who once would have called him a hero. It was a Monday early last

Lauren Hilgers's last article for Harper's Magazine, "The World, Shanghaied," appeared in the October 2010 issue.

February and Wang, a stocky fifty-two-year-old with jet-black hair, a bulldog face, and wire-rimmed glasses, had recently been removed from his position as police chief of the sprawling Chinese city of Chongqing. There were powerful forces at work against him. Officials in Beijing were reported to be investigating Wang's record in the city of Tieling, in the northern

province of Liaoning, where he had also worked as police chief. His driver had been detained and things were going south with his boss, the Communist Party secretary of Chongqing, a man named Bo Xilai.

The accepted story starts with Wang waiting until evening to slip past the guards, then has him switch license plates somewhere along the

Chongqing Communist Party secretary Bo Xilai attends a meeting during the annual National People's Congress at the Great Hall of the People on March 6, 2010, in Beijing © ChinaFotoPress/Zuma Press

highway. In the juicier versions, he takes the extra precaution of disguising himself as an old lady. People say he feared Bo Xilai was going to assassinate him. (One Hong Kong magazine would later report that Bo had considered three distinct ways of arranging Wang's death.) Other people say Wang had vowed that if he went down for corruption, he would take Bo with him. At least one part of the story can be confirmed: Wang showed up at the U.S. Consulate on the evening of February 6 with a mysterious box of papers. He stayed inside for thirty-six hours, talking about Bo Xilai and a man named Neil Heywood while police cars of various jurisdictions accumulated outside. According to a State Department spokeswoman, the former police chief then "left the consulate of his own volition." He was shuttled to Beijing by national-security agents and wouldn't be seen again until his trial seven months later.

Once Wang made it safely inside the consulate, someone quickly leaked the news. Photos from outside the building were spreading on Sina Weibo, China's Twitter variant. It took very little time before people started speculating that Wang was seeking asylum. They wondered what had driven him out of Chongqing. Around eleven A.M. on Tuesday, a cryptic message appeared on the Sina Weibo account of the Chongqing government, only to disappear a few hours later:

According to reports, because of long-term overwork, a state of anxiety and indisposition, Vice Mayor Wang Lijun has agreed to accept vacation-style medical treatment.

China has long preferred to keep its leadership machinations in the shadows. When a scandal comes to light, it tends to do so in a series of facts, half-truths, and outright lies that are nearly indistinguishable from one another. This process blurs the lines between reality and politics, history and propaganda, and, in Wang's case, between a murder investigation and a political takedown. "The reverse of truth," wrote Montaigne, "has a hundred thousand shapes and a limitless field." China's political scandals offer little verifiable information, and little of it is recoverable by historians. When, for

example, Mao's second-in-command, a man named Lin Biao, disappeared in 1971, it took months for the public to figure out where he had gone. Mao announced that Lin's plane had crashed somewhere over Mongolia. Later, Chinese officials claimed Lin had been heading to the Soviet Union after an abortive attempt on Mao's life. Western scholars have long doubted this account, but intervening decades have offered little in the way of clarifying information.

In the years prior to his flight, Wang had been building his power at the side of China's most colorful and controversial politician. Bo Xilai had brought him to Chongqing to help launch a dramatic crackdown on the city's mafia. The resulting criminal and municipal-corruption trials made the front pages of newspapers all over the nation, which celebrated the downfall of such criminals as Xie Caiping, the Godmother of the Underworld, and Wen Qiang, the city's former deputy police commissioner. Bo seemed poised to soar up through the ranks of the Communist Party; Wang's base of power seemed secure. Wang was so pleased with himself that he was said to be commissioning a movie about his partnership with Bo and their role in the crackdown. This was, of course, before Bo Xilai lost his job and his political standing, before his wife became implicated in the murder of a foreign national. Wang was the first loose thread.

Since the death of Deng Xiaoping in the 1990s, China's leaders have become increasingly bland. To guard the country against the risk of another Mao, they rule by consensus, and the consensus builders, until very recently, have all been technocrats. Leaders in Beijing rely for their power on the popular perception that they have specialized knowledge, on an aura of wise remove and a façade that suggests seamless, monolithic conformity. When provincial or municipal leaders misbehave, the national party's upper echelons can claim ignorance or swoop in like angry parents. People still turn up in Beijing to petition the central government as they once would have petitioned the emperor, seeking redress for local injustices.

Maybe it is because of this scrupulous image management that China's leaders seldom smile and almost never wave. Once, someone threw a shoe at Chinese premier Wen Jiabao during a speech he was giving at Cambridge University. Where George W. Bush, facing a similar projectile in Baghdad, had dodged athletically, Wen didn't duck or even flinch. The shoe went wide and he paused for a moment, allowing his gaze to follow its arc. Wen is considered one of China's most accessible politicians, but he chooses his words so deliberately that a British journalist once likened his manner to that of a teacher in a classroom of children with learning disabilities.

In this world of poker faces, Bo Xilai was a smiler. He was a different kind of politician simply because he acted like a politician. He was tall and good-looking and wore nicely tailored suits. He held press conferences and shook hands vigorously. He drew attention to himself, and to China's government, while other political leaders were careful to keep a low profile. As the Party secretary of Chongqing from 2007 to 2012, Bo built an image as the champion of China's downtrodden and an upholder of communist values. He promoted his accomplishments in speeches and through the state-controlled media. In 2009, Chinese outlets reported that atop six Chongqing high-rise buildings signs had been erected that read SECRETARY BO, YOU WORK HARD.

Although he played the populist, Bo was as close to royalty as members of the Chinese Communist Party get. He is a "princeling," the powerful son of a powerful revolutionary leader. His father, Bo Yibo, was one of China's "Eight Immortals," a group of men who ruled the Communist Party under Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s and early 1990s. Before he became powerful, however, Bo Yibo and his family suffered. During the Cultural Revolution he was denounced by the Party, and the younger Bo, after a short run with a faction of the Red Guards called United Action, spent his early twenties in a labor camp. His mother had been abducted by another Red Guard faction, and died in their custody as a result of either illness, murder, or suicide. When people want to underscore

Bo's ruthlessness, they will often bring up an unverified story from this period about how Bo once beat up his disgraced father, breaking the older man's ribs to protect his own reputation. According to a little-known author named Yang Guang, who writes that he heard it from a man named Yang Beicheng, the elder Bo once said that this was the moment he realized his son would be a good Party leader.

After Mao's death, the family made a comeback. In 1992, Bo Yibo proposed that each high-ranking veteran of the revolution "contribute one child" to the national party's future leadership. By then, many children of revolutionaries were already on track to become high-ranking officials, supported by their parents but expected to prove their worth. Xi Jinping, who became leader of the Communist Party this past November and is expected to be named president this month, is the son of the revolutionary Xi Zhongxun. Xi was sent to Hebei province in 1982 to get his start in Zhengding County. By 1986, Liu Yuan, the son of Liu Shaoqi, was serving as the mayor of a city in Henan province. Bo Xilai had gone to university to study world history and journalism with the ambition of becoming a foreign correspondent. He ended up working as the deputy Party secretary of a rural county in Liaoning province, where he steadily rose through the ranks.

Before he arrived in Chongqing in 2007, Bo had served as the Party secretary of Dalian, Liaoning's second-biggest city, then the governor of the entire province, after which he moved to Beijing to serve as minister of commerce. In Dalian, Bo planted so much grass that people started calling it Xilai grass. He deftly courted foreign investors and money poured in, transforming the city. Bo instated fines for cursing in public. He hired a biographer. Around the same time, Gu Kai-lai, Bo's second wife (his first marriage having ended in a messy divorce), became one of the first Chinese lawyers to win a civil lawsuit in the United States; she wrote a book that got turned into a TV miniseries called *Winning a Lawsuit in America*.

Even during his rise in Dalian, Bo also demonstrated a knack for making enemies. During the Fifteenth Party

Congress, though he was serving as the mayor of Liaoning's second-biggest city, Bo was so disliked by other officials that he was excluded from the provincial delegation. During his tenure in Dalian, Bo sentenced a journalist named Jiang Weiping to eight years in jail for revealing state secrets—this soon after Jiang published a series of articles on the Bo family's shady business dealings. ("To get any contracts in the city, you had to go through Bo's wife," I was told by Jiang, who is now living in Canada.) In a leaked cable from the U.S. Consulate dated December 4, 2007, one consular source named Gu Su commented that Bo had been hurt by his reputation for using people and trading on his name.

By the time Bo was sent to Chongqing (the Communist Party shuffles lesser personnel once every five years, top leaders once every ten), his appointment as the city's Party secretary was widely considered a sidelining. Bo, it was already clear, was seeking a more powerful post—one of China's most powerful posts, in fact: a seat on the Politburo Standing Committee. The committee's numbers have in the past twenty years fluctuated between seven and nine. Two of the seats are occupied by China's president and premier; in many cases, these two are no more influential than their five or seven comrades.

In early 2012, the Party was preparing to swap out the majority of its standing-committee members in its decennial leadership transition, a maneuver that had been accomplished without incident only once before. There is really no good time for an attempted defection, and Wang Lijun had picked both the worst and the last possible moment to flee. The transition was fast approaching, and Bo was expected to participate. If you opposed Bo, and many people did, this was the final opportunity to get rid of him before he possibly took a seat at the pinnacle of China's political apparatus.

Three weeks after Wang fled, I spoke to Cheng Li, a scholar at the Brookings Institution who has been following China's leadership changes for decades. According to Li, the players who wished to use Wang to oust Bo faced a dilemma: "If you only charge him with corruption, this is not enough, because

in the Chinese popular mind most leaders are corrupt. You need to find something more than a corruption scandal. But then you will enter a new arena. You could shock the public about how awful it has been in the central leadership."

There are two big political meetings in China: those of the National People's Congress, held annually, usually in March, and the National Congress of the Communist Party, held every five years, usually in October. The first is for lawmaking, the second for personnel decisions. The NPC gathering takes place in the Great Hall of the People, a titanic classical building on the west side of Tiananmen Square. Red carpets run through the hall's entryway, up the central stairs, and into the main auditorium, where officials gather under a gigantic red star set in the ceiling and surrounded by concentric circles of gold light.

On the opening morning of the 2012 NPC, about four weeks after Wang Lijun showed up at the American consulate, I stood at the east entrance of the Great Hall, waiting for Bo Xilai. For the most part, China's top leaders avoid the pedestrian east entrance, which faces Tiananmen Square and leaves them open to the advances of journalists. They instead file in through the north entrance, where journalists are kept at bay with red velvet. The attendees' preference is easy to understand; journalists have turned covering the NPC into a contact sport. (Considering that newspapers typically print only what government censors allow, the journalists' enthusiasm is less easy to understand.) Officials of any rank or interest can be literally tackled by the Chinese press corps. Those trying to escape trip and fall with alarming frequency.

Bo had a populist image to uphold. In previous years he had strutted through the east entrance, leaving himself open to the mob, handling them with a smile. He had been the star of previous NPCs, often presiding over three-hour press conferences. Now, following Wang Lijun's flight, people were unsure whether he would even show up. I stood with a pack of Chinese journalists in front of a line of metal detectors that were constant-

ly going off and being ignored. Delegates were streaming in, some in military uniform, a few in the full ethnic regalia of their minority regions—colorful robes and elaborate headpieces. For the most part, however, the delegates tended to look the same: hair dyed black, suits black and boxy. They showed off only with their accessories; while I was occupied searching for Bo, Chinese photographers were busy zooming in on some outlandishly expensive watches. In the end, Bo came in through neither the north nor the east entrance. Someone suggested he had been smuggled in underground. No one saw him until he was seated, yawning and scribbling on a piece of paper, in the main auditorium of the Great Hall of the People.

The NPC is an overwhelming event, for the number of delegates, the reach of the decisions made there, and for the cat-and-mouse game the organizers play with the press. The event is designed to be totally impossible to navigate.

In order not to miss the Chongqing delegation's press conference, I took to hounding all the Chinese journalists I knew. Eventually, a few days into the meeting, one of them told me that the press conference would be held the following morning. Bo hadn't showed up at one of the big meetings that day, and people were speculating that this absence was the first sign of his imminent demise.

By the time I got to the Great Hall on Friday morning, a mob of angry journalists had gathered at the base of a staircase leading to some of the smaller meeting rooms in the building. A row of men in black suits were letting in only people who had applied online. There had been no application form on the NPC website. I lied to get past the first set of guards, telling them I had applied, and had made it up the first flight of red-carpeted stairs when someone with a clipboard and a list stopped me. On my way back down, an overzealous foreign-ministry functionary pushed me just enough that I lost my balance and fell into the throng, resulting in a brief moment of crowd surfing. Later, someone from the foreign ministry explained the media limitations. "It's a small room," he said. "This is for your safety!"

The handful of journalists who were let in were unsure what had earned them the privilege, but they were charitable. A reporter for Bloomberg News was emailing notes on the meeting as it progressed:

He's drinking tea in a navy suit with yellow tie sitting under a big red banner ... I didn't see it coming, Bo says of Wang. This thing came on suddenly, Bo says of Wang Lijun. ... He also broke some economic news, check it out: China's Gini [a coefficient that measures wealth disparity] has exceeded 0.46, Bo says. Bo says reducing wealth divide and Gini Coefficient are major tasks of Chongqing govt. "If only a few people are rich then we are capitalists, we've failed," Bo says.

History is full of examples of authoritarian regimes with little need of consent from the people they govern; China's is not one of these. The Party's concern with maintaining legitimacy, however, puts it in a difficult position. Its leaders cannot measure populist mandates in votes, and their judicial system does not operate independently of the Party. In other countries, leaders might be able to invoke royal or revolutionary birthright to justify their reign. In a functioning democracy, people can consent to a system even if they don't like their current leaders. In China, however, the philosophical underpinnings of the Party's right to power have been in flux over the past thirty years. To explain the worth of their ruling elite, they maintain that their system of leadership is a meritocracy. The Party has a stable bureaucracy, a robust security apparatus, and a sixty-three-year history of political, social, and economic revolution. Everything else is performance-based.

Even before the death of Deng Xiaoping, China's last all-powerful head of state, Chinese leaders occupied themselves establishing legitimacy for the government as a cooperative. "They cannot base their legitimacy on the claim of representing the working class, as the revolutionary cadres did," wrote the political scientist Hong Yung Lee of the Party in 1991. "And they will not be able to maintain their elite status unless they deliver the promised economic benefits to the Chinese people."

With no single charismatic leader to cement their authority, China's leaders settled on a formula of bureaucracy and economic growth. "To rebel is justified" gave way to the technocrats' policy of "scientific development."

The problem with this formula now is that China's economic boom is slowing. The government has started lowering its target for GDP growth. "There is a new game of politics," says Brookings's Cheng Li. "You need to find new sources of legitimacy." Chinese people still report happiness with the direction of their country, but protests ("mass incidents") have been happening with greater and greater frequency. One Tsinghua University professor estimated that there had been around 180,000 such incidents in 2010. It's also becoming clear that China's wealth is accumulating in some corners and not in others. Corruption among officials is one of the Party's biggest challenges.

Bo Xilai offered a potential solution—one that didn't require real political reform. He relied on his populist appeal, his revolutionary bloodline, and an utter disregard for the law. He was undoubtedly corrupt, but in Chongqing, as in Dalian, he rolled out policies with something for everyone. Bo orchestrated a return to communist values, sending out mass text messages with his favorite Mao quotes. He promoted the singing of "red songs" and banned all prime-time advertising on Chongqing's television station, encouraging its executives to run patriotic films instead. Bo's "red culture" campaign turned him into a figurehead for China's New Left, a movement that lionizes Mao and looks to return to what adherents think of as a simpler, less corrupt era. Bo planted trees (Xilai trees), built low-income housing, and attracted investment. At the same time, Bo's "Chongqing model" encouraged a greater economic role for China's state-owned enterprises. His anti-mafia campaign, promoted with the slogan "Strike the black," helped him wipe out his opponents and establish an extensive surveillance network—but it also helped Bo beef up the police force, making the city safer. Bo cast himself as a champion of China's poor, a crusader against corruption, greed, and inequality.

"It's not us who took the initiative to fight the underworld," Bo said to the Chongqing media.

It's the underworld who has compelled us to do so. The public has been gathering at the gate of our government building, holding blood-stained pictures, deeply distressed. The underworld has killed innocent people with machetes, like butchers killing pigs—too horrible to see.

His antimafia campaign could be interpreted as a criticism of Chongqing's former leaders as well as of those in Beijing who had not cracked down publicly enough on corruption; he was disrupting the Party's carefully groomed appearance of consensus. And once Bo's mafia investigations were in full swing, he could target whomever he wanted. Business leaders who ran afoul of Bo's friends sometimes found themselves wanted men.

While Bo was making his last stand at the NPC, I decided to take a day off and meet some of his supporters in the New Left. A website called Utopia had been one of Bo's staunchest advocates, and its information page mentioned a "bookstore," along with very detailed directions on how to get there. I gave them a call and a young, pleasant-sounding woman said I should stop by.

The Utopia bookstore looks like the kind of place I would have hung out as a college student. Located on the sixth floor of an apartment building, it is absolutely stuffed with books. A rack of green hats, each with a red star, greets visitors at the entrance. Farther inside, between bookcases and a central reading table, a tiny, dangerous-seeming spiral staircase leads up to a second level. There were a few T-shirts for sale, and on the wall was a back-lit clock decorated with a serene-looking Mao Zedong. When I walked in, a group of people stuffing envelopes at a table looked up from their work, and a middle-aged lady shouted, "A foreigner has arrived!"

After a few seconds of confusion, a kid wearing one of the green hats stood up from behind a computer monitor to greet me, introducing him-

self as Lei Ge. He explained that none of the people here represented Utopia. They were all volunteers or people who hung out in the bookstore, he said. They held all sorts of different beliefs. The only thing that united them, he said, was this large piece of calligraphy on the wall. I am a passable reader of printed Chinese, but a truly hopeless reader of calligraphy.

"What does it say?" I asked.

"It says, *THE PEOPLE CHERISH CHAIRMAN MAO.*"

I asked whether they were New Leftists, and Lei Ge started explaining that maybe some of them were New Leftists, which meant that they were people with socialist values who supported China's economic reform. At this point a woman in a gray sweater with a red Mao pin on the left shoulder stood up and bellowed, "I don't agree with our economic reform!" She walked over to me. "I represent myself! I am a regular old lady. I came here because my friend asked for help stuffing envelopes," she said, waving an index finger at me that looked just a little too short. It appeared to have been chopped off at the top knuckle. "Who is my ideal leader?" she asked. "My ideal leader is Mao Zedong!"

Later it came out that she would settle for Bo Xilai. The people at Utopia bookstore were Bo's target audience. They wanted to be engaged; they worried about the fate of their country and were hungry for more information, whatever the source. And Bo, more than other Chinese politicians, was available. For them, a little accessibility went a long way. The regular old lady listed her concerns: Capitalism had made some people happy, but it had made some people rich and some people poor. It had also made people corrupt. Leaders weren't concerned with equality or the poor. China bowed too easily to America's demands. And Bo Xilai, she said, was the only leader addressing her concerns. "We all pretty much support Bo Xilai here," a visiting volunteer from Shandong told me. He was a little bit suspicious of me and asked to be identified as a "reader."

The reader ended up being my favorite person in the room. He sat down with me and chatted while

everyone else circulated to and from the table, cleaning up, taping together huge packages of books. The store was cold and the reader was wearing a puffy jacket. He had his hands jammed in his pockets and looked a little unkempt. He had a nice, gravelly voice. The reader said that big companies ought to be regulated more carefully and that leaders ought to pay attention to the poor. "Things might be all right with your friends in Beijing," he said. "But if you go to a poor area and see how they live and what they eat ..." The reader had seen Utopia's website and had sought out the bookstore for the first time on an earlier trip to Beijing. There aren't many places like it, he told me.

A young woman who was sweeping scraps of paper from under the table chimed in. "We don't have decision-making power," she said. "But we can tell the government that we like Bo Xilai. We can let them know there are people who support Bo Xilai. This is all regular people can do."

On the final day of the NPC, Wen Jiabao held his annual press conference—the last of his career. He took the opportunity to criticize Chongqing's leaders, first obliquely and then directly. Bo's red-songs campaign had reminded some in China of the Cultural Revolution, and Wen warned against allowing such a catastrophe to happen again. "Reform has reached a critical stage. Without the success of political reform, economic reforms cannot be carried out. The results that we have achieved may be lost," he said. Later he added: "The present Chongqing municipal Party committee and the municipal government must reflect seriously and learn from the Wang Lijun incident."

The next day, in a one-sentence bulletin released by the state-owned news service Xinhua, it was announced that Bo Xilai was being removed from his post in Chongqing:

Recently, the CPC Central Committee came to a decision: Zhang Dejiang has been appointed municipal committee member, standing committee

member, and Party secretary of Chongqing; Bo Xilai will no longer serve as secretary, standing committee member, or member of the CPC Chongqing municipal committee.

He never went back to the city; aside from one Japanese political commentator who claims to have dined with him in April, no one has heard from him since. So the story of Wang Lijun and Bo Xilai became public in the typical fashion of Chinese scandals—through rumors and unnamed sources, punctuated by detectable amounts of government censorship and the rare short statement from the central leadership. Things appeared on and disappeared from the Internet. Bo's name would end up blocked on Sina Weibo. The censors did their best to chase down his nicknames. Bo was known for his red spirit, so the censors soon had to block the word for "tomato." "Why do rumors repeatedly arise in the Bo Xilai incident?" a Xinhua headline asked in April.

As soon as the one-sentence announcement was released, there was a minor explosion online. People variously celebrated or mourned Bo's removal. Leftist websites were shut down. When you tried to reach Utopia, a message popped up saying the site was down for maintenance. It came back with much of its Bo Xilai content removed. Then another article in support of Bo Xilai appeared. Then the site was shut down again.

Eventually commenting was suspended on Sina Weibo for three days as a punishment to its users for spreading rumors, but in the days following the announcement Bo was among the most written-about topics. And then came the rumors of a coup. They arrived late at night with a photo that appeared to show a military tank poorly disguised as a green cargo truck rolling into Beijing. Someone reported hearing shots coming from Zhongnanhai, the Communist Party's leadership compound. The theory went like this: Bo Xilai, with the support of the standing-committee member Zhou Yongkang, had been raising an army in Chongqing. Bo had organized the attack after the central government tried to penalize him. With no one

to call inside the regime and no one coming out to dispel them, the rumors persisted for days. Around the same time, someone in Beijing crashed a Ferrari into a bridge. People on Sina Weibo wondered who had been driving. The word "Ferrari" was blocked.

The coup rumor may have been false, but soon another incredible story started circulating. A British man named Neil Heywood had died in Chongqing under mysterious circumstances the previous November, two and a half months before Wang Lijun's flight. A Shanghai journalist named Yang Haipeng posted on Sina Weibo that Heywood and Bo Xilai were connected through Bo's son, Bo Guagua (whose name translates as "Bo the very best" or, literally, "Bo melon melon"; cousins Bo peach peach and Bo fruit fruit round out the unusually named generational cohort). "Deceased: Guagua's nanny," Yang wrote.

Nationality: British. Place: Chongqing. Handled by: Wang Lijun. Cause of death: Wang was not allowed to investigate. The body was not preserved but instead immediately cremated.

This was the Sina Weibo rumor that would confirm everyone's general faith in Sina Weibo rumors. A few days later, the United Kingdom requested an investigation into Heywood's death. Soon the stories multiplied. Neil Heywood was a British spy. He was a nanny. He had been sleeping with Bo's wife. He had been helping the family smuggle money out of the country.

I went to talk to Yang Haipeng in April amid a cloud of speculation about Neil Heywood. Yang didn't want to speak on the phone, so we agreed to meet at a coffee shop. An hour before the meeting, he texted and told me to come to a different location, a place called the Shan Na Na, which turned out to be a massage parlor in the basement of a hotel. I walked in to find Yang already sitting there with his feet in a bucket of hot water, his pants rolled up to his knees. Two of his friends were laid out in the plush lounge chairs next to him, apparently sleeping as their feet were massaged. A giant

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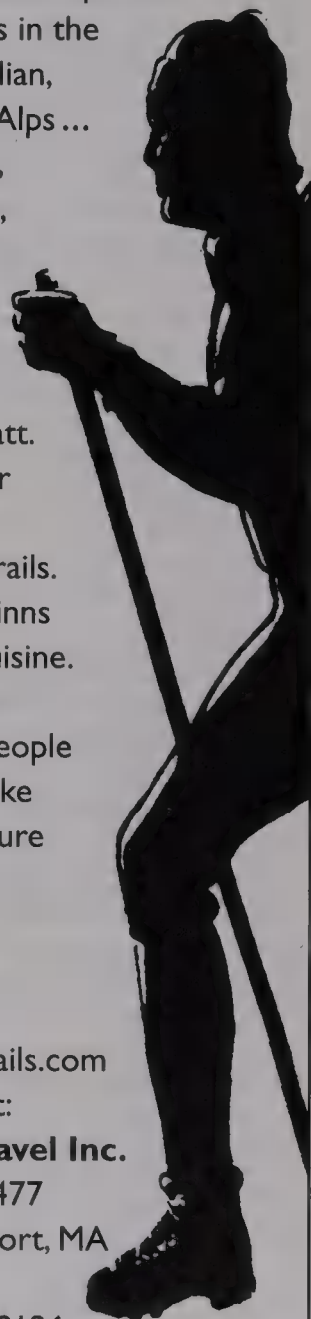
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flatscreen television mounted on the wall was tuned to CCTV News. "We just got back from hiking in Dali," Yang explained, referring to a vacation destination in southern China. He lay back in his sofa chair and started chain smoking. "What do you want to know?"

Yang's cell phone rang constantly; conversations with him were brief and full of hard-to-read grunts. "I am the best investigative journalist in China," he told me. "Only, they won't let me write anymore."

These are some of the premium rumors Yang passed along to me: When Neil Heywood died, four policemen were first at the scene. "That was in November," he told me. "In January, two of them were beaten to death." A few days after Heywood's body was discovered, Bo's wife met with Heywood's wife in a teahouse they had had emptied of people. Gu Kailai cried at that meeting. Yang wasn't himself sure whether Bo and Gu had killed Heywood, but he said he wouldn't be shocked to find out they had. "They were thugs," he said. "The princelings are all thugs."

At that point Yang got a call. He had just returned from Dali, he told the caller. He had no new information. He grunted a few times in assent, hung up the phone, then turned toward me. "They are meeting about Bo Xilai right now," he said. "There will be an announcement tonight."

The rumor had spread online that a seven o'clock news broadcast would include new information on Bo. It didn't. (The farcical Twitter entity Relevant Organs took this opportunity to tweet, "This has been a test of the Emergency News System. Had this been actual news, we'd have deleted it.") But around eleven o'clock a short message appeared on the Xinhua website.

As Comrade Bo Xilai is suspected of being involved in serious discipline violations, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) has decided to suspend his membership of the CPC Central Committee Political Bureau and the CPC Central Committee, in line with the CPC Constitution and the rules on investigation of CPC discipline inspection departments.

In another release published later that night, the Party vowed to re-investigate Heywood's death "according to law" and said that Gu and "an orderly at Bo's home" named Zhang Xiaojun had been detained. The next day, the *New York Times* ran a story quoting an anonymous source who said that Bo's discipline violations included "mismanaging his family."

The news of Gu Kailai's arrest and the removal of Bo from his innumerable positions arrived with a corresponding barrage of affirmation from the state-run media. "Chongqing supports CPC decision to investigate Bo Xilai," ran one headline. "Our nation is a nation of socialist rule of law and the authority of the law cannot be trampled," said a commentary in the *People's Daily*.

The moment Beijing started pushing its version of the story, things got even murkier. Neil Heywood, it turned out, was a freelance consultant, salesman, and fixer who had likely met Bo in Dalian. He told friends he had helped Bo Guagua get into Britain's Harrow School. He drove a Jaguar (luxury cars have been a recurring motif in this scandal). At first, Heywood's family all seemed convinced he had died of a heart attack.

As the scandal developed, reporters started tracking Gu's business connections. Unnamed sources leaked outrageous stories about her behavior. She had demanded Heywood divorce his wife and swear loyalty to her, went one story. She had dressed up like a general following Heywood's death, went another, and made an insane speech to a group of Chongqing police officials, claiming she was under secret orders from China's Ministry of Public Security to protect the safety of Wang Lijun.

The trouble with the unattributed stories, however, was that no one could be sure what agenda their sources had. Many of those being interviewed were leaking information third- or fourthhand. Wang Kang, a Chongqing intellectual, businessman, and dissident, took risks to speak on the record to Western jour-

nalists, but admitted he had met Bo Xilai only once. *Time* magazine's Hannah Beech noted that different sources had started repeating the same phrases to her over and over. And government censorship was becoming increasingly uneven, blocking the word "Ferrari" but allowing a Sina Weibo post that repeated a rumor about a cop having cut off a piece of Heywood's corpse to keep as evidence. "In some cases it's clear that the dissemination of information regarding the Bo scandal, as well as some so-called independent analysis from Chinese experts, has been orchestrated," wrote Beech.

Another problem with the many stories coming out about Bo was that they were not, in the landscape of official corruption in China, out of the ordinary. His wife and family were getting rich off his political successes. But as soon as the window on Bo's personal finances was opened, people started wondering about the families of other political leaders. Investigations by Bloomberg and the *New York Times* found Xi Jinping and Wen Jiabao's relatives had grown rich during the two men's tenures, investing in oil, life-insurance companies, and diamonds. Children of elite politicians have kept themselves busy running huge state-owned companies and private-equity funds and, occasionally, driving Ferraris into bridges. Many local governments had, like Chongqing, gone deep into debt making investments in infrastructure. When I asked Jiang Yanbei, the author of a double biography of Bo Yibo and Bo Xilai published in Hong Kong in 2009, whether his thoughts about Bo had changed, he said, "My opinion of Bo Xilai stands the same. If you say Bo is a schemer, then whoever wiped him out is a schemer as well."

Amid the noise, however, were a few stories that offered a more complicated picture of Bo's rapid decline. In April, the *New York Times* ran a story about Bo's bad habit of wiretapping other officials. Citing nearly a dozen unnamed sources, the article reported that Bo had tapped a call between a visiting foreign official and Hu Jintao, China's president. A *Wall Street Journal* story explored

Bo's ties to the military, reporting that a trip he made in February 2012 to a military base in Yunnan province had spooked Beijing.

Cheng Li had told me there were two groups who disliked Bo Xilai: Party leaders and liberal intellectuals. Looking at the flood in China's state-run media of opinion pieces and calls for the military to pledge allegiance to the Party, it's clear that Bo was more than just disliked—he was feared. A campaign promoting unity was deemed necessary. The vice chairman of China's Central Military Commission was quoted in Xinhua, telling troops that “the entire military needs to consciously serve and subordinate to the Party.” An op-ed in the *People's Daily*, written by Yin Fanglong, head of the political department of the 2nd Artillery Corps, read,

Strict political discipline of party members and cadres should always be as taut as bowstrings. When something happens, first think of Party discipline and political impact. Do not carelessly guess or inquire about it. Do not listen. Do not believe. Do not pass on rumors.

As the months following Bo's arrest passed, the pace of new leaks and speculation slowed. The Party began the process of closing the book on the case as quietly as possible, removing Bo piece by piece from all groups in which he had once been a member. “The Standing Committee of the 11th National People's Congress (NPC) on Friday announced the termination of Bo Xilai's post as the NPC deputy,” said an official story released through Xinhua in October. “The Seventh Plenary Session of the 17th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) on Sunday endorsed a decision made by the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee to expel Bo Xilai from the CPC,” reported Xinhua in November.

In August, Bo's wife had her day in court. She appeared so bloated and unrecognizable that people on Sina Weibo started asking whether the woman standing there was Gu Kailai at all. Officials in China have been known to use body doubles.

Gu pleaded guilty to poisoning Neil Heywood. The court was open only to approved attendees, but according to an unofficial report, the arguments presented included the claim that Heywood had physically kidnapped Gu's child, Bo Guagua. She received a suspended death sentence, which typically translates to life in prison. Wang Lijun, who was tried in September, was sentenced to fifteen years in prison for defection, abuse of power, and “bending the law for selfish ends.”

Bo, now that he is no longer a member of the Communist Party of China, should be next in line. Expelling him cleared the way for a criminal trial, and Bo stands to be the most prominent leader to face this kind of proceeding since the Gang of Four were tried in 1981. In the meantime, the power transition that Bo hoped to participate in has already gone forward, with only a few additional disruptions: the handover was delayed from October to November without explanation, and the man slated to take over leadership, Xi Jinping, disappeared for two weeks in September. Now that Xi is in power, it looks as if he is taking a few cues from Bo's playbook, at least cosmetically. Under Xi, the Party has ordered officials at meetings to keep it short and “with no empty rhetoric or rigamarole.” On a recent tour of southern China, Xi repeatedly showed up to events without a necktie. Unlike Bo, however, Xi spent years keeping his head down. So little is known about his beliefs that some people are seeing hope of political reform in absent cravats.

Months before any of this came to pass, I visited Chongqing to see what remained of Bo's legacy. The banners celebrating him were gone, but the evidence of his many campaigns was all over town. In a park near the city's university district, signs designating specific areas for red singing were still up, and a few elderly people were still belting out songs. I saw buildings whose façades had recently received new coats of paint, whose balconies and air-conditioning units were covered

with modern-looking wooden slats—all Bo Xilai, I was told. There were new trees, new traffic circles, new subway stations.

Following my arrival, a number of my appointments suddenly canceled; among the few who did not was Alan Zhang, a young copywriter who in 2003, as a university student, had started blogging about technology and had since moved on to national and university politics. He picked me up and drove me to a new luxury retail development with a Costa Coffee inside. He was thin and had dressed smartly to meet me, in black pants and a white button-down shirt. His teeth were prominent in a way that inclined him to purse his lips, adding to his generally thoughtful air. He believed that Bo had acquired too much power, that the Communist Party in general had too much power. “People have the right to go to the park and sing whatever song they like,” Zhang said. He told me that Bo, left unchecked, would have turned into a Nazi (this had become a pretty common thing to say).

There is a Chinese saying that you will hear often if you bring up politics: “The sky is high and the emperor far away.” It's an aphorism normally invoked to suggest that leaders in Beijing are too removed to know what is going on locally, but people in Chongqing were using it to explain the lack of available information about Bo Xilai. For a moment, he had been the most accessible of Chinese politicians. He had been remarkable for sticking his head above the parapet. And while the Party's fears of allowing the rise of another cult of personality were well founded, Bo offered people a chance to feel they were participating, if only a little. Then Wang Lijun fled and it turned out that Bo, or at least his wife, had been killing people, and that Bo had been no more candid than any other Party secretary.

As much as Zhang disapproved of him, though, it was Bo who had made him follow politics in the first place. “Before Bo Xilai, we didn't know who our leaders were,” Zhang told me. “I don't know what I talked about before then. I guess I paid attention to my hobbies.” ■

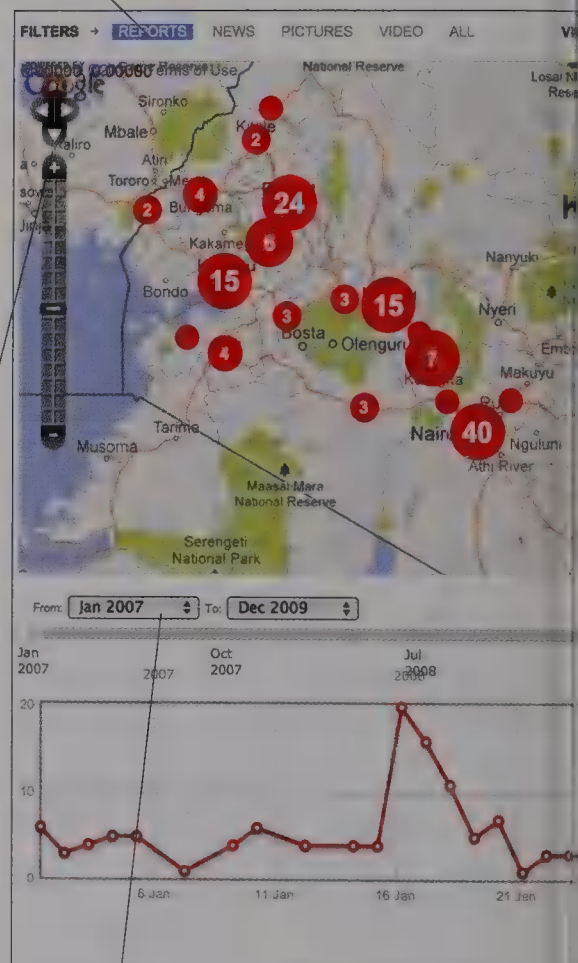
WITNESS

How Ushahidi is mapping crises and

In the final days of 2007, a tense election in Kenya led to widespread violence. After a disputed count, the incumbent, Mwai Kibaki, a member of the Kikuyu ethnic group, was declared president in a hurried ceremony. Within hours, attacks began in the Rift Valley. Members of the Kalenjin ethnic group smashed and looted Kikuyu-run shops, attacked their neighbors with machetes, and burned down houses and churches. Kikuyus carried out retaliatory attacks on Luos and Kalenjins in the slums of Nairobi, the capital, and Naivasha, a town to the northwest where tribally mixed groups of migrants work in the vegetable and flower industries. As the riots spread, police officers killed more than a hundred people in failed attempts to control the chaos. By the time a coalition government was formed two months later, more than 1,200 people were dead and 500,000 had been driven from their homes. This month, when Kenyans vote in a presidential election for the first time since 2007, their choices will include Deputy Prime Minister Uhuru Kenyatta, who is under indictment by the International Criminal Court for his role in the violence. Kenyatta is one of the front-runners.

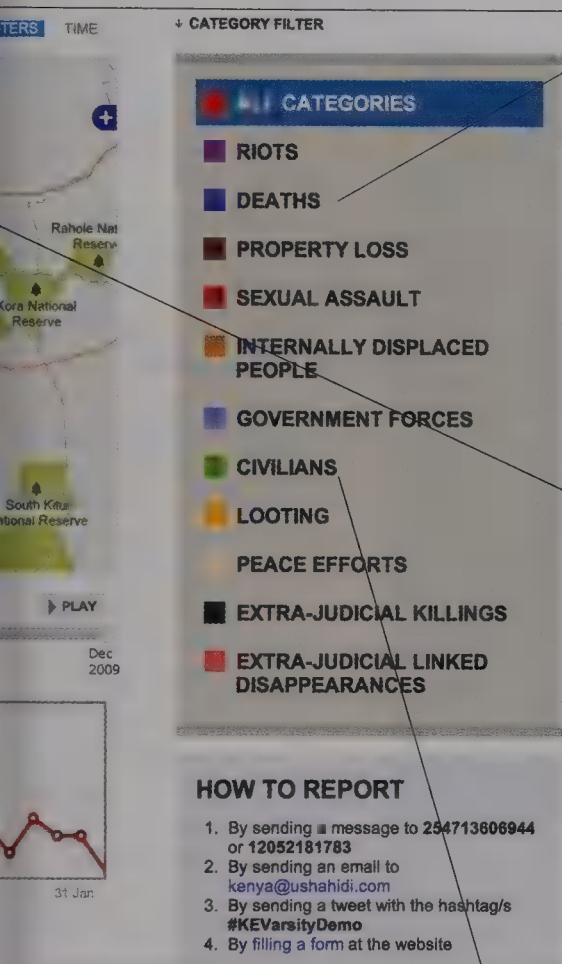
Ory Okolloh wrote about the 2007 election on her blog, *Kenyan Pundit*. When the attacks started, she gathered reports from friends around the country but saw that the Kenyan media was barely covering the story. Okolloh got in touch with a group of tech-savvy friends in the United States and Kenya and proposed creating a “mash-up”: a Google Map that plotted the incidents reported by her sources and could be updated on the fly by anyone with new information. Within a few days, the first version of Ushahidi (which means “witness” in Swahili) was up and running. New reports could be submitted by email, text message, or online. “We were a little embarrassed because it was so rudimentary,” said Erik Hersman, who helped write the code. But it worked: although Ushahidi was neither well known nor well publicized, it ultimately received 465 reports from around the country.

As the Kenyan election crisis subsided, the individuals who had briefly become the Ushahidi team—Okolloh and Hersman, along with David Kobia, Daudi Were, and Juliana Rotich—talked about how to build on what they had created. In May 2008, Hersman and Kobia won a \$25,000 prize for Ushahidi at a tech competition in San Francisco; additional funding allowed the team to start working on the project full-time. The platform they created allows for real-time reporting on humanitarian crises anywhere in the world. It remains open-source, can be downloaded for free from the Ushahidi website, and allows updates from Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube in addition to text-message and email reports. Once a map is launched, its creators can monitor and moderate it or leave it alone. “We are giving people a skeleton on which they can flesh out their own ideas,” said Rotich, who is now Ushahidi’s executive director.



OJECTION

and the world, by *Tristan McConnell*



The breakout moment for the platform was the Haitian earthquake of January 2010, when a map created by an Ushahidi staffer based in Boston became the prime resource for emergency services and aid agencies working in Port-au-Prince. In the following year, Chileans used Ushahidi to map damage from their own earthquake, Pakistanis used it to track catastrophic flooding, and Russians used it to coordinate relief for victims of summer wildfires. When severe snowstorms hit the East Coast of the United States, midwives set up “Blizzard Babies 2011,” a map that showed pregnant women the whereabouts of the nearest midwife and how to get in touch. “That was the moment I realized this was different, this was generative,” said Rotich. The platform was used to find out where humanitarian aid was needed during the revolution in Libya and to share and disseminate information following the tsunami in Japan. Some of the maps are more lighthearted: “Burger Map,” for example, allows you to “submit a burger” rather than a crisis report. (Okolloh, who now works for Google, is worried about mission creep. “The name is not accidental. It means ‘witness,’ ‘testimony,’” she said. “There’s a risk of that being lost.”) The software has been used to create more than 40,000 maps in 159 countries and thirty languages.

For the March elections in Kenya, Ushahidi’s founders plan to operate the platform themselves. They’ve launched a new site for the event called Uchaguzi (Swahili for “choice”). “Last time we were reactive. This time we want to make sure we have something set up in advance,” said Hersman, the current director of operations and strategy. During a Kenyan constitutional referendum in 2010, Ushahidi gathered information from voters and passed news of irregularities to an observer group. (In the end there were very few complaints, and the new constitution was approved after a peaceful day at the polls.) As the votes from this election are tabulated, the company hopes to use its crowd-sourced reports to keep the count honest. Voters can monitor their own election alongside traditional observer organizations.

For almost two years, a group called Syria Tracker has been documenting the deaths in the Syrian uprising against the regime of Bashar al-Assad using an Ushahidi map. Security concerns mean the simplest method of submitting reports—text messaging—is not permitted: “The number-one thing we did not want to do was SMS: they can be traced,” I was told by one of the group’s four staff members, who did not want to be named for fear that relatives and friends still living in Syria might face reprisals. People wishing to submit reports are given instructions on how to mask their identity and location. By the end of 2012, Syria Tracker had compiled reports of 47,887 deaths culled from thousands of emails, tens of thousands of news reports, and millions of tweets (marked with the hashtag #basharcrimes). The group removes duplicates by comparing the reports based on time, date, and location. Like all crowd-sourced information, Syria Tracker’s reports are incomplete and imperfect, but they may nevertheless prove to be the most accurate records available of the bloody events in Syria. The data collected there could provide a prosecutor with invaluable evidence should the Assad regime finally fall. ■

Tristan McConnell is a journalist based in Nairobi.

A LETTER TO PAUL WOLFOWITZ

Occasioned by the tenth anniversary of the Iraq war
By Andrew J. Bacevich

Dear Paul,

I have been meaning to write to you for some time, and the tenth anniversary of the beginning of the Iraq war provides as good an occasion as any to do so. Distracted by other, more recent eruptions of violence, the country has all but forgotten the war. But I won't and I expect you can't, although our reasons for remembering may differ.

Twenty years ago, you became dean of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and hired me as a minor staff functionary. I never thanked you properly. I needed that job. Included in the benefits package was the chance to hobnob with luminaries who gathered at SAIS every few weeks to join Zbigniew Brzezinski for an off-the-record discussion of foreign policy. From five years of listening to these insiders pontificate, I drew one conclusion: people said to be smart—the ones with fancy résumés who get their op-eds published in the *New York Times* and appear on TV—really aren't. They



excel mostly in recycling bromides. When it came to sustenance, the sandwiches were superior to the chitchat.

You were an exception, however. You had a knack for framing things creatively. No matter how daunting the problem, you contrived a solution. More important, you grasped the big picture. Here, it was apparent, lay your métier. As Saul Bellow wrote of Philip Gorman, your fictionalized double, in *Ravelstein*, you possessed an aptitude for "Great Politics." Where others saw complications, you discerned connections. Where others saw constraints, you found possibilities for action.

Truthfully, I wouldn't give you especially high marks as dean. You were, of course, dutiful and never less than kind to students. Yet you

seemed to find presiding over SAIS more bothersome than it was fulfilling. Given all that running the place entails—raising money, catering to various constituencies, managing a cantankerous and self-important faculty—I'm not sure I blame you. SAIS prepares people to exercise power. That's why the school exists. Yet you wielded less clout

than at any time during your previous two decades of government service.

So at Zbig's luncheons, when you riffed on some policy issue—the crisis in the Balkans, the threat posed by North Korean nukes, the latest provocations of Saddam Hussein—it was a treat to watch you become so animated. What turned you on was playing the game. Being at SAIS was riding the bench.

Even during the 1990s, those who disliked your views tagged you as a neo-conservative. But the label never quite fit. You were at most a fellow traveler. You never really signed on with the PR firm of Podhoretz, Kristol, and Kagan. Your approach to policy analysis owed more to Wohlstetter Inc.—a firm less interested in ideology than in power and its employment.

Andrew J. Bacevich teaches at Boston University. He is the author of The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War, to be republished next month in an updated edition.

I didn't understand this at the time, but I've come to appreciate the extent to which your thinking mirrors that of the nuclear strategist Albert Wohlstetter. Your friend Richard Perle put the matter succinctly: "Paul thinks the way Albert thinks." Wohlstetter, the quintessential "defense intellectual," had been your graduate-school mentor. You became, in effect, his agent, devoted to converting his principles into actual policy. This, in a sense, was your life's work.

Most Americans today have never heard of Wohlstetter and wouldn't know what to make of the guy even if they had. Everything about him exuded sophistication. He was the smartest guy in the room before anyone had coined the phrase. Therein lay his appeal. To be admitted to discipleship was to become one of the elect.

Wohlstetter's perspective (which became yours) emphasized five distinct propositions. Call them the Wohlstetter Precepts.

First, liberal internationalism, with its optimistic expectation that the world will embrace a set of common norms to achieve peace, is an illusion. Of course virtually every president since Franklin Roosevelt has paid lip service to that illusion, and doing so during the Cold War may even have served a certain purpose. But to indulge it further constitutes sheer folly.

Second, the system that replaces liberal internationalism must address the ever-present (and growing) danger posed by catastrophic surprise. Remember Pearl Harbor. Now imagine something orders of magnitude worse—for instance, a nuclear attack from out of the blue.

Third, the key to averting or at least minimizing surprise is to act preventively. If shrewdly conceived and skillfully executed, action holds some possibility of safety, whereas inaction reduces that possibility to near zero. Eliminate the threat before it materializes. In statecraft, that defines the standard of excellence.

Fourth, the ultimate in preventive action is dominion. The best insurance against unpleasant surprises is to achieve unquestioned supremacy.

Lastly, by transforming the very nature of war, information technology—

an arena in which the United States has historically enjoyed a clear edge—brings outright supremacy within reach. Of all the products of Albert Wohlstetter's fertile brain, this one impressed you most. The potential implications were dazzling. According to Mao, political power grows out of the barrel of a gun. Wohlstetter went further. Given the right sort of gun—preferably one that fires very fast and very accurately—so, too, does world order.

With the passing of the Cold War, global hegemony seemed America's for the taking. What others saw as an option you, Paul, saw as something much more: an obligation that the nation needed to seize, for its own good as well as for the world's. Not long before we both showed up at SAIS, your first effort to codify supremacy and preventive action as a basis for strategy had ended in embarrassing failure. I refer here to the famous (or infamous) Defense Planning Guidance of 1992, drafted in the aftermath of Operation Desert Storm by the Pentagon policy shop you then directed. Before this classified document was fully vetted by the White House, it was leaked to the *New York Times*, which made it front-page news. The draft DPG announced that it had become the "first objective" of U.S. policy "to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival." With an eye toward "detering potential competitors from even aspiring to a larger regional or global role," the United States would maintain unquestioned military superiority and, if necessary, employ force unilaterally. As window dressing, allies might be nice, but the United States no longer considered them necessary.

Unfortunately, you and the team assigned to draft the DPG had miscalculated the administration's support for your thinking. This was not the moment to be unfurling grandiose ambitions expressed in indelicate language. In the ensuing hue and cry, President George H. W. Bush disavowed the document. Your reputation took a hit. But you were undeterred.

The election of George W. Bush as president permitted you to escape from academe. You'd done yeoman work tutoring candidate Bush in how the world works, and he repaid the debt by ap-

pointing you to serve as Donald Rumsfeld's deputy atop the Pentagon hierarchy. You took office as Osama bin Laden was conspiring to attack. Alas, neither Rumsfeld nor you nor anyone else in a position of real authority anticipated what was to occur. America's vaunted defense establishment had left the country defenseless. Yet instead of seeing this as evidence of gross incompetence requiring the officials responsible to resign, you took it as an affirmation. For proof that averting surprise through preventive military action was now priority number one, Americans needed to look no further than the damage inflicted by nineteen thugs armed with box cutters.

You immediately saw the events of 9/11 as a second and more promising opening to assert U.S. supremacy. When riding high a decade earlier, many Americans had thought it either unseemly or unnecessary to lord it over others. Now, with the populace angry and frightened, the idea was likely to prove an easier sell. Although none of the hijackers were Iraqi, within days of 9/11 you were promoting military action against Iraq. Critics have chalked this up to your supposed obsession with Saddam. The criticism is misplaced. The scale of your ambitions was vastly greater.

In an instant, you grasped that the attacks provided a fresh opportunity to implement Wohlstetter's Precepts, and Iraq offered a made-to-order venue. "We cannot wait to act until the threat is imminent," you said in 2002. Toppling Saddam Hussein would validate the alternative to waiting. In Iraq the United States would demonstrate the efficacy of preventive war.

So even conceding a hat tip to Albert Wohlstetter, the Bush Doctrine was largely your handiwork. The urgency of invading Iraq stemmed from the need to validate that doctrine before the window of opportunity closed. What made it necessary to act immediately was not Saddam's purported WMD program. It was not his nearly nonexistent links to Al Qaeda. It was certainly not the way he abused his own people. No, what drove events was the imperative of claiming for the United States prerogatives allowed no other nation.

I do not doubt the sincerity of your conviction (shared by President Bush) that our country could be counted on to

exercise those prerogatives in ways beneficial to all humankind—promoting peace, democracy, and human rights. But the proximate aim was to unshackle American power. Saddam Hussein's demise would serve as an object lesson for all: Here's what we *can* do. Here's what we *will* do.

Although you weren't going to advertise the point, this unshackling would also contribute to the security of Israel. To Wohlstetter's five precepts you had added a silent codicil. According to the unwritten sixth precept, Israeli interests and U.S. interests must align. You understood that making Israelis feel safer makes Israel less obstreperous, and that removing the sources of Israeli insecurity makes the harmonizing of U.S. and Israeli policies easier. Israel's most effective friends are those who work quietly to keep the divergent tendencies in U.S.-Israeli relations from getting out of hand. You have always been such a friend. Preventive war to overthrow an evil dictator was going to elevate the United States to the status of Big Kahuna while also making Israelis feel just a little bit safer. This audacious trifecta describes your conception. And you almost pulled it off.

Imagine—you must have done so many times—if that notorious MISSION ACCOMPLISHED banner had accurately portrayed the situation on the ground in Iraq in May 2003. Imagine if U.S. forces had achieved a clean, decisive victory. Imagine that the famous (if staged) photo of Saddam's statue in Baghdad's Al Firdos Square being pulled down had actually presaged a rapid transition to a pro-American liberal democracy, just as your friend Ahmed Chalabi had promised. Imagine if none of the ensuing horrors and disappointments had occurred: the insurgency; Fallujah and Abu Ghraib; thousands of American lives lost and damaged; at least 125,000 Iraqis killed, and some 3 million others exiled or displaced; more than a trillion dollars squandered.

You expected something different, of course. Shortly before the war, you told Congress:

It's hard to conceive that it would take more forces to provide stability in post-Saddam Iraq than it would take to conduct the war itself and to secure the surrender of Saddam's security forces and his army. Hard to imagine.

Your imagination led you to foresee a brief conflict, with Iraqis rather than U.S. taxpayers footing the bill for any mess left behind.

After all, preventive war was supposed to solve problems. Eliminating threats before they could materialize was going to enhance our standing, positioning us to call the shots. Instead, the result was a train wreck of epic proportions. Granted, as you yourself have said, "the world is better off" with Saddam Hussein having met his maker. But taken as a whole, the cost-benefit ratio is cause for weeping. As for global hegemony, we can kiss it goodbye.

What conclusions should we draw from the events that actually occurred, rather than from those you hoped for? In a 2003 *Boston Globe* interview, Richard Perle called Iraq "the first war that's been fought in a way that would recognize Albert's vision for future wars." So perhaps the problem lies with Albert's vision.

One of Wohlstetter's distinguishing qualities, you once told an interviewer, was that he "was so insistent on ascertaining the facts. He had a very fact-based approach to policy." Albert's approach was ruthlessly pragmatic. "It derived from saying, Here's the problem, look at it factually, see what the questions are that emerged from the thing itself, so to speak." Then confront those questions.

One of the questions emerging from the Iraq debacle must be this one: Why did liberation at gunpoint yield results that differed so radically from what the war's advocates had expected? Or, to sharpen the point, *How did preventive war undertaken by ostensibly the strongest military in history produce a cataclysm?*

Not one of your colleagues from the Bush Administration possesses the necessary combination of honesty, courage, and wit to answer these questions. If you don't believe me, please sample the tediously self-exculpatory memoirs penned by (or on behalf of) Bush himself, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Rice, Tenet, Bremer, Feith, and a small squad of eminently forgettable generals.

What would Albert Wohlstetter have done? After Iraq, would he have

been keen to give the Bush Doctrine another go, perhaps in Iran? Or would he have concluded that preventive war is both reckless and inherently immoral? That, of course, had been the traditional American view prior to 9/11.

Would Albert endorse Barack Obama's variant of preventive war, the employing of unmanned aircraft as instruments of targeted assassination? Sending a Hellfire missile through some unsuspecting jihadist's windshield certainly fits the definition of being proactive, but where does it lead? As a numbers guy, Albert might wonder how many "terrorists" we're going to have to kill before the MISSION ACCOMPLISHED banner gets resurrected.

And what would Albert make of the war in Afghanistan, now limping into its second decade? Wohlstetter took from Vietnam the lesson that we needed new ways "to use our power discriminately and for worthy ends." In light of Afghanistan, perhaps he would reconsider that position and reach the conclusion others took from Vietnam: Some wars can't be won and aren't worth fighting.

Finally, would Albert fail to note that U.S. and Israeli security interests are now rapidly slipping out of sync? The outcome of the Arab Spring remains unknown. But what the United States hopes will emerge from that upheaval in the long run differs considerably from what will serve Israel's immediate needs.

Given the state of things and our own standing ten years after the start of the Iraq war, what would Albert do? I never met the man (he died in 1997), but my guess is that he wouldn't flinch from taking on these questions, even if the answers threatened to contradict his own long-held beliefs. Neither should you, Paul. To be sure, whatever you might choose to say, you'll be vilified, as Robert McNamara was vilified when he broke his long silence and admitted that he'd been "wrong, terribly wrong" about Vietnam. But help us learn the lessons of Iraq so that we might extract from it something of value in return for all the sacrifices made there. Forgive me for saying so, but you owe it to your country.

Give it a shot.

Andy

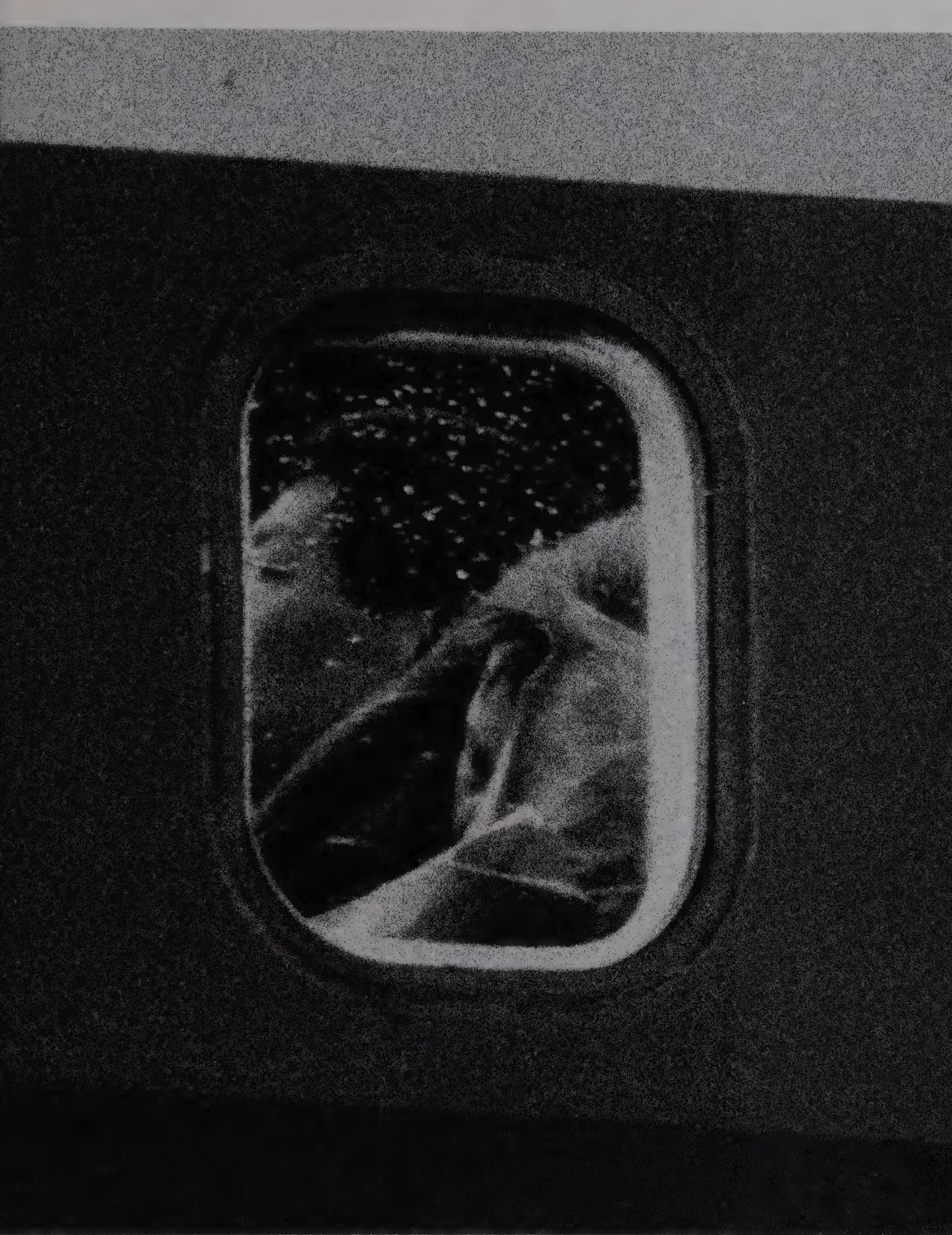
PASSENGERS

Photographs by John Schabel



John Schabel is a photographer based in New York City. His monograph Passengers was released in January by Twin Palms Publishers.

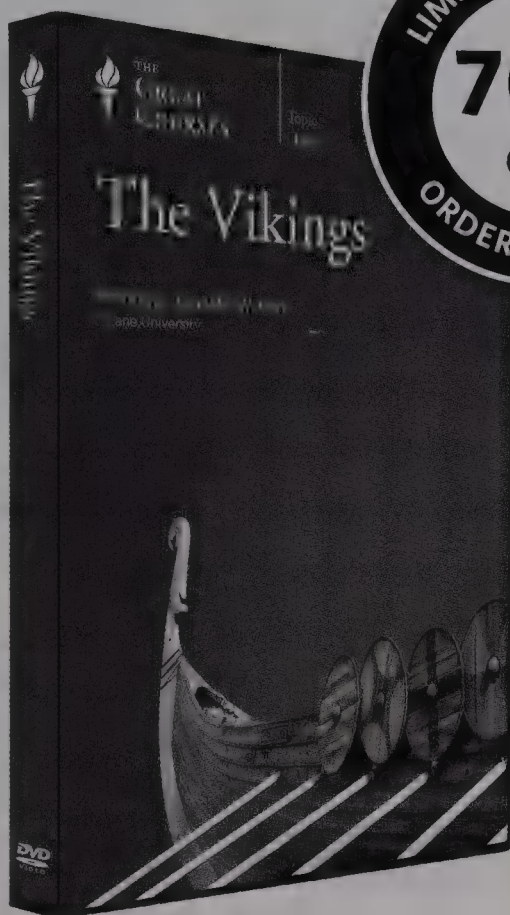








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DEEPER WINTER

By Alexander Maksik

On Monday Luis took Eduardo to watch the Dodgers lose twice to the Padres, and afterward, when they were both a little drunk and wandering around the massive stadium parking lot trying to find the car, Luis said, "I got to kick you out, *hijo*."

Luis put his arm around his nephew's neck and kissed him on the side of the head.

"Vicky?" Eduardo asked.

"Vicky," Luis said and then nothing else until they found the car.

They sat together on the warm red hood with their feet on the bumper and their elbows on their knees. Luis preferred to wait for the parking lot to drain out.

"It's the way it's got to be, *hijo*. I've been putting it off a week. She's moving in and she wants the whole thing."

Eduardo nodded. "Don't worry about it."

He wasn't angry. It had been time for months.

"I have a friend up north," Luis said, watching the cars inch past. "Her son's got work for you. There's a place to stay. Vicky will make you enough food for a week, but it won't take more than a day or two to get up there, depending."

Alexander Maksik is the author of two novels: You Deserve Nothing, which was published in 2011 by Europa Editions, and A Marker to Measure Drift, forthcoming from Knopf.

"Depending on what?"

Luis shrugged. "Whatever."

Eduardo nodded. "North where?"

"The mountains north. Idaho."

Eduardo shook his head. "Fuck."

Luis laughed and rose up so he could pull his wallet out from under his ass. "Here," he said, and, keeping his eyes on the sky, he handed Eduardo two bills.

Eduardo took the money.

"Two hundred, *hijo*. And a bus ticket. And a job. And a place to stay. And enough food for a week."

"Thanks," Eduardo said. He slipped the money into his back pocket. "Don't worry. I'm good, it's good, we're fine, okay? Okay, Lulu?"

"Don't start with that shit."

Out toward the ocean the sky had turned the color of a new scar. The cars weren't going anywhere.

"She'd kill me for this, you know."

Luis turned his head and looked at his nephew. "She'd fucking kill me."

Eduardo squeezed his uncle's shoulder and pulled him tight. "She'd understand. She'd understand, Lulu my man."

Drivers began to turn on their headlights. "You'll need a jacket,"

Luis said. "Cold as hell up there."

Thursday Vicky started with her things, her little black Civic stuffed with shit. No boxes. She used the car

as a box, unpacking it at the curb, carrying bundles of clothes up the walk while Eduardo carried anything hard—stacks of plates, framed posters, two bottles of butterscotch schnapps with the caps sugared closed, nests of half-washed pots and pans.

Vicky patted Eduardo's cheek, barely touching him.

"Eddie, you understand it, right? Me and Lou doing this? Taking a real shot together?"

Today her eyes were blue. Yesterday they'd been a green the color of a costume jewel.

"Since I'm leaving," Eduardo said, "would you just tell me—which are yours? Which are the real ones?"

She smiled at him, got up on her tiptoes, and leaned forward so close that her nose bumped his. Sometimes they were violet.

"These are them," she said. "See?" She widened her eyes.

He looked close. There they were.

"Blue," he said.

"Blue, Eddie." She dropped down and crossed her arms. "So, you understand? Tell me you understand."

"I do, Vicky, I do."

"You're a sweetheart," she said, and when she'd finished hugging him said in a quieter voice, "You know Lou doesn't think so, but I'll bet your mom would have understood."



Eduardo smiled at her and then looked at a crack in the door frame.

"Vicky, she would have cut both your throats," he said.

Sunday morning Vicky put a plastic bag full of foil-wrapped lasagna by the front door, patted Eduardo's cheek, and went to church in hazel eyes, leaving Luis to drive him downtown.

"If you're going to take the bus, Sunday's when to do it," Luis said, checking his mirrors.

"Why's that?"

Eduardo hung his arm out the window as low as he could get it, pressed his palm to the red metal, and watched the ivy at the side of the on-ramp turn to guardrail, then the texture of the guardrail blur out to a soft gray.

"Ever been to the Greyhound station on a Friday night, *hijo*?"

"Trying to scare me, Lulu?"

"I'm trying to show you the kind of uncle I am, the kind of considerate man I am, arranging that you go to the bus at the best possible hour of the best possible day."

"Look at you missing church for me."

Luis blew the air out of his mouth. "You ever give her this kind of shit?"

Eduardo laughed.

"So come on and be gentle with me then. You know this doesn't make me happy."

"I'm sorry. I told you it's okay."

Luis reached over and squeezed the back of Eduardo's neck.

It was true that the station was quiet, that anyone who might have caused them trouble the night before was asleep on benches, or under them. Or in the restroom Eduardo used to take a piss despite Luis saying, "You're crazy to go in there. Better to hold it

than be gutted for the two bills in your pocket."

"You're soft, Lulu," Eduardo told him. "You've gone soft all over. *Norte-americano*," he said, poking his uncle in the belly. "*Blanco*."

Soft, he thought as he stood fearless and sad in the reeking bathroom while some living thing writhed quietly in a dark corner.

When he returned, his uncle was leaning against a padlocked cage protecting an unlit Coke machine. He had a foot on the old canvas army duffel.

"Still alive," Eduardo said.

Luis shook his head. "Look inside," he said and kicked the duffel.

There Eduardo found a package wrapped in green paper. He tore it open and held up a light-blue parka.

"Down. Eight-fifty fill," Luis said. "Nothing warmer."

"Thanks, Lulu," Eduardo said, pulling his uncle to him.

Luis kept him close.

"I love you, Eduardo. You know that," he told him as though giving an order. "You know that."

The bus didn't leave till three, and when it did it was only a quarter full. They both raised their right hands and spread their fingers wide. The Greyhound kicked into gear. Luis, standing at the end of the concrete slip, floated away from Eduardo. The slow, unraveling city clung to the bus for more than an hour, until finally they shook free of it and were out in the bright desert. Despite the cold air rising up out of the vents against his arm, Eduardo could imagine the mean heat outside. The sun cut through the glass and across his legs. He closed his eyes. He'd never had problems falling asleep. It didn't matter where he was, or what was beneath him, or what his trouble was.

Coming up, his mother's third time, his first, she'd bound his wrists to the railing of a fixed ladder. They'd watched a boy younger than Eduardo tumble off the train and disappear into the dark. There was nothing to do about it. Even then he fell right to sleep when his mother said it was time. Rocketing north like bandits—his mother young and tough with a bone-handled knife in her boot. Even that boy blowing away in the night didn't keep him awake, but somehow now sleep wouldn't come. Something reminded him of those trains—the drone of the bus, the dead-straight black highway, the sky low as he'd ever seen it.

He imagined that the bus was a boat. He imagined the noise vibrating up through the glass, through his head, was wind. They were breaking through a calm ocean. Everything in front of him was water.

The driver woke him announcing Las Vegas on the PA. The night was very dark, and as he looked out the cold window, it was hard for Eduardo to believe that any city was drawing closer to them, but then a band of light appeared like a rising moon, and quickly it came up and there was nowhere else to look.

He imagined himself at the wheel of a ship sailing into some great city's harbor.

Waiting to transfer, Eduardo wasted three quarters on a slot machine in

the casino next door before he went outside to sit in the warm night air and eat a piece of Vicky's terrible lasagna.

Unlike Los Angeles, the city drifted from them as fast as it had come, and soon the only thing to see in the window was his own wide-set eyes.

He looked nothing like his mother.

He closed his eyes and returned to the wind across the bow, to the open ocean before him. He had no dreams of adventure. Not to sail around the world. Not even to be a fisherman.

Take it out to sea. Return it to shore. Cut the engine. Let it glide into the slip. Each morning head out to sea. What he saw most clearly was the ocean under him, the ocean everywhere. More than anything, what took him to sleep was that water and the smell of moving salt air.

He woke each time before the bus drove into a new city. Something he'd kept from the trains, he thought.

It was after midnight when they stopped in St. George. Through the window Eduardo watched the driver, a squat black man, pulling hard on a cigarette and kicking at the pavement beneath a streetlight. Eduardo could feel the cold air and smell the smoke through the open door.

He watched the sun come up over the desert outside Salt Lake City and at the station ate another piece of the lasagna on another bench and climbed onto another bus. It was Monday. He didn't sleep again. They were at the Boise airport in the afternoon, where he called the number Luis had given him.

The last leg of the trip was in a resort shuttle full of kids passing around a bottle of vodka while Eduardo watched another city slip away. They drove up over a low pass and down onto a wide, dry prairie. One of the kids nudged Eduardo on the arm with the neck of the open bottle.

"Hey, bro. Fiesta?"

Eduardo shook his head and kept his eyes on the mountains to the north.

"Fiesta?" the kid said again, driving harder with the bottle, grinning at his friends.

Eduardo turned his eyes on him—pink face beneath a black Raiders cap.

The noise in the van fell.

They turned north, and soon the yellow prairie gave way to a river valley banked by hills glowing green in the afternoon sun. Deeper in, the hills grew to mountains, some of which still held snow in the cradles of their eastern slopes.

Eduardo got off at a gas station in Bellevue and watched the van disappear around a long turn. He made the second call, bought a Coke, and ate another piece of the lasagna on a low wall out by the air hoses.

A short while later, a red and rusted-out Subaru station wagon pulled off the highway.

"Eduardo," the driver said. It wasn't a question. He slapped the door twice. "Throw your bag in the back."

A few years older. Strong. Hands white with drywall dust. Hair tied back in a loose ponytail. Miguel.

"So. Luis's nephew," he said as he pulled out onto the highway.

Eduardo nodded. "*Cómo lo conoces?*"

"I don't. My mom knew him in L.A., I guess."

"*Es hermoso aquí.*"

"And there's work."

"What is it? Houses?"

Miguel nodded. "I'll get you on tomorrow. You do anything aside from pound nails?"

Eduardo shrugged. "Whatever you need."

"Ever hung drywall?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Sprinklers. Insulation. A patio once. You know, pavers."

"Just don't tell him you can do shit you can't."

"Who's the guy?"

"Contractor. White guy. Tracy."

"Tracy a dude?"

"Call him Trace. There are worse."

In Hailey, they turned off the highway into a subdivision and then onto the gravel driveway of a white house surrounded by a dying lawn.

In the kitchen there were four aluminum folding chairs around a square of plywood stacked on four cinder-block towers. In the living room a few cushions were arranged around a TV on the floor.

Eduardo followed Miguel down a hallway.

"This is yours," he said, opening the last door to reveal a small blue-carpeted bedroom. A mattress fitted with a

clean yellow sheet lay beneath the window. A pillow rested against the wall next to a folded white blanket.

Eduardo stepped inside.
"Get some sleep if you want," Miguel said. "I've got to go pick up my mom. We'll have dinner together later. There's a towel in the closet there and a shower down the hall and some beer in the fridge."

"Gracias."
"You can put your bag down now." Miguel smiled, gave Eduardo a gentle punch to the kidney, and left.

After he heard the car pull away, he went to the kitchen, where he traded the lasagna for a can of Coors Light. Then he took one of the folding chairs onto the porch.

When the dark reached the porch, the cold came with it. The very highest mountain walls were fading from gold to pink to purple. He took a last look and went inside, pulled off his clothes, wrapped the towel around his waist. There was good pressure, better than in Los Angeles, and something in the warm beating water made him cry. It was momentary and sudden. An upsurge in his chest, rising tears instantly washed away.

He woke in a dark room to a slamming door. He did not remember his dreams. Miguel stood in the door frame, lit from behind by the dim hall light.

"Eddie," he whispered, "come eat. Come meet my mother."

Miguel's mother opened her arms in the kitchen and said, "Mister Eduardo of the Angels." She wore wide, round, clear-framed glasses on her pudgy face—the face of a heavy woman. But she was tall and small-breasted, sturdy and strong, as if somehow she'd been given the wrong body. Or the wrong head.

She took Eduardo into her arms and said again, "Mister Eduardo of the Angels, all the way from Los Angeles." She smelled of soap and sweat.

She kissed the top of his head and pushed him away. Arms extended, hands firm on his shoulders, she shook her head. "I'm looking for Luis. I'm looking for your mother. But, no," she said. "No."

"My father's son," Eduardo said.
"I doubt that," she said. "I doubt that."

They ate dinner in the kitchen. Black beans, rice, good corn tortillas, reheated *carnitas*.

"The truth is—" She glanced at Miguel and smiled. "Cover your ears, chico."

Miguel closed his eyes and finished his can of beer. She took off her glasses and rested them next to her plate. She was very tired, but her eyes were bright when she leaned forward, glanced once more at Miguel, and said, "The truth is, Eddie, we were lovers, me and Luis. *Amantes. Dios mío, Eddie.* Miguel doesn't like me speaking Spanish, but *Dios mío, Dios mío.*"

After she'd kissed them good night, as if they were both her sons, and gone to sleep, and after they'd finished washing the dishes together, Eduardo sat outside with his fists in the new parka while Miguel smoked a cigarette.

"What's your mom do?"
"Cleans houses. Everything's houses up here. Build them. Clean them."

"*Por qué no hablamos español aquí?*" Eduardo asked.

"Superstition," Miguel said.

In the early morning, Miguel drove them deeper into the valley. Soon the ski mountain appeared, its slopes like veins, wide rivulets of green between the pines. They passed through Ketchum—clean sidewalks, restaurants, ski shops, and brick banks. They turned off the highway and crossed the rushing Big Wood, water slapping at its banks, threatening to flood. There were large houses behind gates, horses the color of dead grass gazing sternly over the fences of their corrals.

The site was near the end of the new road, on a rise where the fresh asphalt ran out, turned to dirt, and spilled into Forest Service land. The house had already been framed. Damp soil sprayed with grass seed encircled the property. Miguel parked the car next to a black pickup and took Eduardo up to the trailer. Trace was a stocky, red-bearded man with hairless, muscular arms crossed over his chest.

"Eighty a day for eight hours and thirty minutes for lunch. If it works out, we'll talk in a few weeks and see where we are. Okay by you?"

Eduardo nodded.
"The roofers are short a guy so I'll start you with them. From there, whatever we need until we finish or the money runs out." They walked together



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toward the house. "Place is going to be fucking huge," he said, shaking his head. "I'll pay you cash end of each day. You come see me at the trailer. Anyone asks, you don't work here and I've never seen you before."

Eduardo followed him up a tall ladder. All the plywood had been laid. It was a pitched roof and went on and on.

"Fourteen fucking bedrooms," Trace said when they got to the top.

They climbed up and down the gables, passing cylinders of roofing felt, until, at the eastern end, they found a tall man in a blue baseball cap, a phone pressed to his ear.

"Yo, Danilo."

The man turned around.

"Eduardo," Trace said, pointing at Eduardo.

"Now you work for Johnny." Trace slapped Eduardo on the shoulder and made his way back.

Johnny lent him a utility knife, a hammer, and a pair of hard-cap knee pads. They worked all morning together, snapping chalk lines across the black felt, cutting it, tacking it down. The sun came up from behind the mountains, and by ten they were sweating and shirtless. There were two other roofers working the other end of the house, but Eduardo never saw them, and in the heat, hunkered down with Johnny Danilo, he learned fascia, flashing, hip, ridge, valley, vent pipe, dormer, dry-in, learned it would be a cedar shake roof. Stainless-steel nails. No expense spared.

He ate lunch with Miguel in a stand of aspens.

"Need to get you some gloves," Miguel said, both of them looking at Eduardo's hands, sticky and stained black.

At dinner Eduardo was so exhausted he could barely speak. Miguel's mother refused to let him wash the dishes. She took him by the wrist and led him to his bedroom. Later she returned, knelt down, groaned, and patted his cheek.

"*Sueña con los angelitos*," she whispered. "*Sueña con los angelitos*."

Mornings they drove up the valley and out to the site. Miguel hung dry-wall, Eduardo tacked felt, and as the days passed, black crept like a shadow across the roof. The great pallets of shake arrived on a white flatbed Ford. Eduardo and Johnny Danilo started to turn the shadow red.

Each day, as the sun rose higher, the

air took on the clean smell of cedar and everything began to move in order. One shake, two pops from the staple gun, back and forth, line by line, staggered two-one, two-one.

Each evening they left the site, picked up their money, picked up Miguel's mother, drove home, ate dinner together, and went to bed early. Each night Eduardo lay on his mattress beneath the white blanket, skin burning against the cold air leaking through the window, back pulsing with pain. In the few moments before sleep he saw the faultless puzzle, the wood in his hands, the easy recoil of the staple gun, everything in line, everything cut to fit. He felt safe inside it. His dreams were thick with darkness. Inside them nothing moved.

Before bed Eduardo looped the wristband of his watch through the cracked handle of the coffee mug he used for water. When the alarm beeped, he had to roll onto his side and slowly bend himself in half before he was able to stand. But once he was up, huddled in his coat in the car, valley still dark, mountains bright with morning sun, the air thin, his hands around a paper cup of coffee, he felt a tired and immediate joy. There was the systematic making of the roof. There was Miguel and his mother, both of them calm, kind people. (And they were quiet, a characteristic in others to which Eduardo was unaccustomed and that brought him peace and comfort.) And there was the place itself—the clean streets, the aspen leaves like green coins trembling in the late-afternoon wind, the light as lovely and sad as the light in Los Angeles, the narrow river, the pines pushing out into an endless wilderness, the lengthening days.

They worked on through the first week and made overtime on Sunday—the eighty plus an extra twenty-five. He liked Danilo, whose son Leo rode his purple bike to the site in the afternoons and waited with a book in the back of Johnny's pickup, or walked the Forest Service fence like a tightrope, calling up to the roof, every now and then, "Look, Dad, look!" Danilo raised his head every time, throwing down a smile no one else ever saw.

The next Saturday, Danilo let Eduardo finish it—two guttural gasps

from the staple gun, the hiss of the hose returning to ready—and the black entirely vanished, the wind blowing warm and pungent with cedar. Afterward, Danilo took Eduardo and Miguel to Grumpy's, where they sat at the bar and Eduardo watched the cook deal hamburger buns across the grill, pull cold burgers from squares of paper, and press them down with a silver double-long spatula. He turned four at a time and, peeling slices of cheddar from a tall stack, spun them with a soft snap of the wrist onto the meat gone from dull to glistening.

Eduardo nodded once and imperceptibly to the others in recognition of something—artistry, the bodily expertise of repetition, a thing, whatever it was, familiar. The orders built up, and with each swing of the front door the flock of pale-green checks shivered beneath their clips.

Roofs were imagined and they were built. Here behind the bar, the orders would always come.

Now in front of them were three enormous glasses of beer. The men toasted the finished job.

"So, Danilo," Miguel said, "where's your boy?"

"It's his mother's weekend."

All three of them nodded.

"She live around here?"

"South of town."

All three nodded again. They did not really know one another, and in speaking there was no easiness between them. Eduardo didn't need the talk anyway—it was enough to watch the beer fall down the curved insides of his glass, the man assembling burgers—but Miguel wanted to talk. Maybe it was because Danilo was white. Maybe it was because he and Eduardo were the only two in the bar who weren't.

"How long you been working with Trace?" he asked.

"Long fucking time," Danilo said. "Been doing his roofs for, shit, a long fucking time. You?"

"Oh, few months. Five maybe. Not long."

"What'd you do before?"

Miguel took another drink.

"Backup killer."

They both turned and looked at him.

"The fuck's a backup killer?" Danilo asked.

"Chickens."

"You worked a slaughterhouse?"

Miguel nodded. Danilo opened his mouth like he wanted to know more but saw Miguel's eyes and shut it. Eduardo looked over at Miguel's hands lying on the bar—cut up, old, and barely alive—and then returned his eyes to the grill.

"So you got another job for me?"

"Got three of them, Eddie, one after the next straight through the summer. Shit, straight through October. So if you want to keep on—"

"I'm on as long as there's work."

"Here's to that, then." Danilo raised his empty glass. "And Miguel, brother, you staying on with Trace?"

"Long as I can."

"Bright futures for all, then,"

Danilo said, and ordered cheeseburgers.

They were eight days into a roof up Eagle Creek. It was a smaller house set back against a high hill covered with sage, on expensive property north of town. Beneath steep gables, fitted and framed at the narrow northern and southern ends, were entire walls of glass. Danilo and Eduardo were harnessed and working off two ropes on opposite sides of a ridge anchor. They'd laid the plywood and the felt with two other guys, but now it was just the two of them installing cheap shingles, which held neither the color nor the smell of shake, and here in the hot day the odor of sage filled the air.

Leo was standing in Danilo's truck unloading rocks he'd collected in his T-shirt. When they clattered against the steel bed, Eduardo rose up, stretched his back, and let the rope take his weight. He turned and over his shoulder watched Leo fire rock after rock at a dry post, missing every time.

"Follow through," Eduardo called down.

The kid looked up, shaded his eyes, and smiled. Danilo was on the other side of the roof, hidden away from his son; the only evidence of his existence were rhythmic reports from the staple gun echoing and dying in the hills.

Leo wound up, kicked his knee high, and sent another rock in the direction of the post, missing by fifteen feet.

"Hey, Fernando, follow through."

"I'm not Fernando," Leo said, laughing.

"Anyone can see you're not Fernan-

do. Fernando wouldn't miss the plate by fifteen feet. Fernando would have put a hole in that post. Then he would have put the rest of those rocks through the hole—*whoosh, whoosh, whoosh.*"

"Who the heck's Fernando?"

Leo wound up again and sent one way out to the left.

"Valenzuela."

Leo shook his head like Eduardo was crazy and sent another rock skidding into the brush.

"Throw through the post, Leo. You're stopping short."

Leo tried again.

"Listen to the man." Danilo's voice rose up from the other side of the roof.

"Your hand should hit your left thigh on the follow-through. Go on. Try it."

Leo sent another. This time hard and straight, missing the post by just a foot.

"There you go, Fernando. There you go," he said, and went back to work. Pop, pop. Pop.

Soon there was the good sound of rock against post, followed by Leo's high little hoot. Eduardo raised his gun in the air and fired six rounds.

"Fernando!" he yelled out.

"Fernando," Danilo called, invisible.

The hills had begun to brown. Where the river curved the inner tubes dragged and kids had to walk to deeper straights. Cutthroats were easier to catch. Some nights it fell below freezing. Mornings they wore insulated gloves.

With Miguel, there was no more to come, nothing more to be revealed—not of history, not of desire, not of fear. What Eduardo knew of Miguel after these few months was all Miguel would give. He and his mother were so quiet at dinner, communicating in sighs and nods. They were together, the two of them, in a way that was absolute. In a way that excluded. Both things can't exist at once. He was their guest. They protected him. Loved him, even, but he was always their guest.

One night after work, after a few beers with Danilo, Eduardo came home and they were gone. Somehow he wasn't surprised to find their rooms emptied. They'd left his things. His money squared at the back of the third dresser drawer. No note.

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Eduardo stood in the kitchen holding onto the handle of the open refrigerator door. There were three bottles of Coors Light. A few eggs. A carton of milk. He stared at the drawer marked CRISPER, kept his eyes on the rolling white script. He tried to breathe slowly, but he could not bury it, so he stood up straight and slammed the door hard. There was the sound of glass against glass, of the bottles rolling to a stop, and then everything was quiet again.

If they'd left there was a reason, and Eduardo knew not to stay. He stuffed the duffel and walked out the door. He wouldn't call Lulu, who would feel responsible and insist Eduardo return to L.A. So there was Danilo. Who showed up an hour later with Leo leaning forward, an elbow on the dash, smiling and waving as the truck pulled up.

Eduardo tossed his bag in the back and climbed into the cab. The truck idled. Danilo moved the stick back and forth.

"So it wasn't their house?"

Eduardo shrugged.

"Did you know?"

"I didn't think they owned it."

"You know what I mean, Eddie."

There was reproach in Danilo's voice.

"I didn't think about it."

"About what?" Leo asked, punching Eduardo's shoulder again and again.

"The people Eduardo was living with left," Danilo said.

"Aren't they coming back?"

Eduardo looked at the mountains' sharp silhouette against the sky.

"I don't think so, Fernando," he said.

"So where will you live?"

"That's the fifty-dollar question," Danilo said, glancing at Eduardo.

"You can live with us if you want,"

Leo said, speeding up his punches. "We've got room."

Danilo reached over and cupped the back of his son's head in his hand.

"Sure, Eddie. Live with us awhile," he said, putting the truck in gear, looking over his shoulder, returning to the highway, taking them north.

It was a small condo in the last part of town still affordable to bartenders and construction workers. And even there, had Danilo not owned the place for twenty years, he'd have had to move south along

with everyone else who wasn't rich and retired.

Danilo made spaghetti. The three of them ate it with tomato sauce and powdered Parmesan. After dinner, Danilo refused to let Eduardo do the dishes, so he and Leo played catch with a stuffed animal. A fox Leo said was named Carl.

Eduardo knew he couldn't stay. There wasn't enough room. He didn't want to make Danilo say it.

After Leo went to bed they sat out on the little balcony that faced the street.

"You need it, you got work with me through the end of October."

"After that?"

"After that? I got nothing lined up. And after that? Winter's after that."

"Then what do you do?"

"Tend bar. Stay warm."

The two men were quiet for a while. The air was sharp with cold.

"I'll ask around," Danilo said. "We'll find you something."

"Thanks, Johnny."

Two yellow dogs trotted beneath the balcony, their tags jangling. Eduardo looked down and watched them flash between the slats under his feet and disappear.

"Never trust a fucking drywaller."

"I'm sure they had reasons."

"You're not mad?"

Eduardo shrugged. "Maybe the owners showed up. Maybe someone called the cops."

"Maybe."

They were waiting for a house in Adams Gulch to be framed. School was starting soon. Eduardo, drinking a cup of coffee on the balcony, could see winter coming. Could see it in the sky, in the new angle of the sun, in the yellowing aspen leaves.

For weeks the rain came and went, always leaving fog hanging between the hills. Then the wind would reveal the ski runs dusted with snow. The rain returned. The fog. The air took on the smell of wet earth.

Leo went to school. Eduardo and Danilo went up each day wearing cheap red rain jackets, hauling sheets of three-quarter-inch plywood and nailing them to the joists. Just the two of them to save money.

They were lucky with the weather. The sun came out and dried the wood, and a few days later they began

on the felt. Soon they had the whole thing black. One cold afternoon the shake arrived. The weather was holding on. Standing on the roof, Eduardo could see far into the Sawtooths—ragged mountains covered with snow. He looked down and watched Danilo

pull a thick plastic tarp
over the pallets.

It was four days before Halloween, but Leo refused to wear anything else. He was jumping up and down on the couch. The white jersey hung a little off his shoulders, but otherwise everything fit all right—cap, blue stirrups, white pants, blue belt, looping cursive across the chest. VALENZUELA across the back.

Danilo had been on the phone in his bedroom with the door shut.

"Get off the goddamn couch, Leo. Christ."

He went into the kitchen and opened the refrigerator.

"*Qué pasó, Johnny?*"

Danilo brought his beer around the counter and sat on the couch. He leaned over and kissed Leo on the head.

"We lost the job," he said.

Eduardo looked at Danilo, who was watching the fire.

"What job?"

"The one we're on."

"We just started it."

"We're done for the season."

"How can they do that?"

"Ran out of money, Eddie. Same thing's happening all over town. We're lucky we made it this far."

"I've got money. I can help out with the rent."

Danilo raised his eyes from the fire to meet Eduardo's.

"You got to think about a place to live," he said.

Eduardo nodded. "Sure, Johnny. I'll find somewhere."

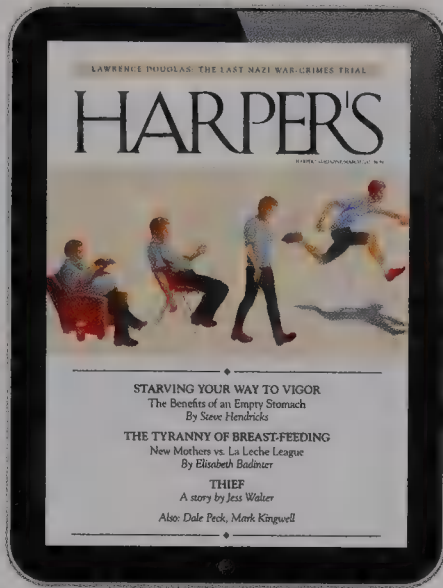
"I don't know," Danilo said.

Eduardo pulled the stirrup from Leo's sock and let it snap back.

He had saved more than \$4,000. He could go where he wanted. Maybe to L.A., to Lulu. Maybe return to Oaxaca. He could live a long time on that kind of money. Or go to the beach. Puerto Escondido, maybe. Learn to work a boat. Carry tourists up and down the coast.

Leo's voice brought him back.
"Are you in a bad mood?"
"No, Fernando. I'm fine."
"Eddie, you can stay as long as you want to here."
"Thanks."
"He always gets mad when there's no money."
Eduardo smiled.
"But you can still stay forever. It doesn't matter."
That night, a friend of Danilo's came over with a pizza. He was a big guy in a Mariners cap and a neat beard.
"Eddie, Dave. Dave, Eddie."
Dave's hand was rough and fat. Leo reached for another slice. Dave leaned back and finished his beer.
"So you guys lost Adams Gulch."
Danilo nodded. "Couldn't even survive on my own this season. I did two jobs for Trace and didn't make shit. Couple of small houses and now this next one's sunk."
"I hear Frank and those guys folded their whole thing and left town. Two years ago those dudes were buying Jet Skis."
Danilo glanced up at Dave, held his eyes, and then looked away.
"So, Eddie," Dave said, leaning forward, "I hear you're looking for work along with the rest of us."
Eduardo nodded.
"I might have something for you down the line here a bit."
"Yeah?"
"Winters I drive a cat."
"A cat?"
"Snowcat."
"It's a machine they use to keep the snow smooth for the skiers. Davy drives up and down the mountain all night," Danilo said.
"So what's the job?"
"Drive my shift."
Danilo tapped a finger on the rim of his bottle.
"You come out with me. I train you. When you get it down, I punch in and you do the first half—midnight to three. I work my bar until close and then come finish the shift. I keep the benefits. You take fifty percent."
"Fifty percent of what?" Eduardo said.
"It'll be about seven hundred a month to you."
Eduardo looked at Danilo, then back at Dave. "You find me a place to live?"

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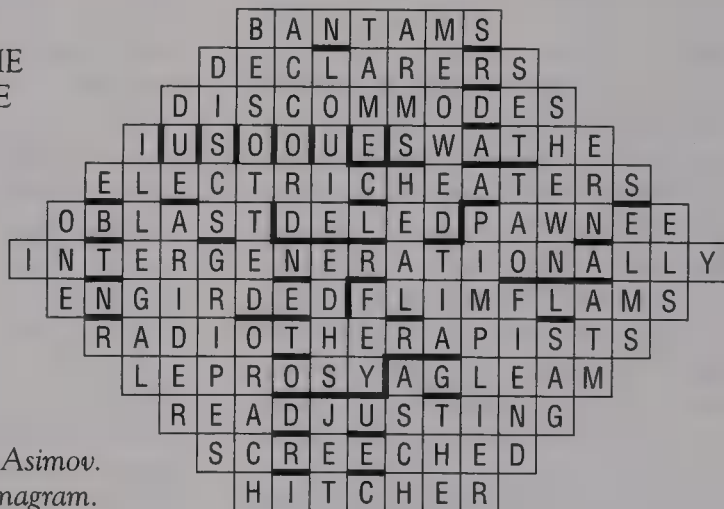
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HARPER'S
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SOLUTION TO THE FEBRUARY PUZZLE

NOTES FOR "SENTENCES":



Puzzle editing by Dan Asimov.
Note: * indicates an anagram.

SENTENCES: a) 9A; b) 31A; c) 23A; d) 40A; e) 1A; f) 36A; g) 14A.

ACROSS: 6. Dec.-l(are)r-S; 12. *; 17. *; 19. de(L[iberal])ed; 20. pun, paw-knee; 27. engirde*-D; 28. f(li)m-F-lams; 34. le(p[enicillin])rosy*; 35. hidden; 39. s(Cree-c)hed.

DOWN: 1. be(so-t[erribly], t[fired], e[xhausted])d; 2. homophone; 3. *; 4. arms(trong); 5. me-owed; 6. D.(is)C.'s; 7. L(oui)e; 8. tes(t), rev.; 9. two mngs.; 10. S(hew)N; 11. I-l-leg-al(l); 13. (t)ern; 15. homophone; 16. rev. 17 o(f-sho)[N]e; 18. a-rider; 20. pimp-lier; 21. el(M)s; 22. Els(e); 24. G(ripe)s; 25. *; 26. odd letters; 28. two mngs.; 29. f(r)iend; 30. ATM(ost); 32. *; 33. rev.; 35. As-ch; 37. two mngs. 38. hidden.

"What's wrong with here?" Dave looked around.

"Find me a place to live and I'll do it."

The first big storm came the second Thursday of November, sweeping fast out of the White Clouds, dropping three feet of snow in four days. The temperature stayed down, and when the weather blew out early Monday morning it left a moonless tar-paper sky blasted through with stars.

Dave had found him a place in a nearly finished new development down by the foot of the mountain. STAR PINE—block letters made of brass riveted to river rock. Six town houses, all of them empty. The driveways still unpaved. Eduardo slept on a narrow mattress on the floor of the enormous master bedroom, his clothes on two shelves in the carpeted walk-in closet. There was a case of Negra Modelo—a housewarming gift from Danilo.

It was early and his feet made no noise as he walked through the snow. The plows still hadn't been through, and it seemed to Eduardo as if everything was at sea, all the solid things around him—cars, buildings, trees—rising and falling. He walked out to the lifts, past the great pine-and-stone lodge, and looked up at the mountain. For a while he sat on a lift and swung his legs. Then he hiked up a ways and stood with his hands pushed into the warm pockets of the parka, hood pulled up over his head. He'd never seen a place change so quickly. He scanned the buildings until he found the wall in front of Star Pine.

Suddenly it was winter. Everything had turned. The dark ground was gone. The air was odorless. Sound vanished.

He didn't believe in any of it. The job. This new place to live. In the deeper winter, he thought, all these people would also disappear. He could return to Los Angeles. He could see those tall date palms against an orange sky, but somehow it seemed an impossible distance to cross.

He was very tired.

By Thanksgiving Danilo was in Reno looking for work, Leo was living south of town with his mother, and late each night Dave knocked on Eduardo's door to take him up the mountain, where he was teaching him to run the

cat. How to navigate the runs, how to operate the blade, how to work the tiller. Eduardo knew it was a foolish plan, but he loved being in the warm cab, grinding up the empty mountain, the instrument panel glowing, headlights illuminating the snow, and night after night the desire to take control of the thing grew. Soon they switched places and now Eduardo drove—one hand on the wheel, the other on the stick, raising and lowering the blade, adjusting the tiller. He liked all of it—the driving, the neat passes up and down the runs, keeping everything in line, everything smooth and ordered, maintaining patterns, the lovely corduroy swaths behind him, the lights of other cats on the slopes.

Something would break. He'd get caught squatting in that lonely town house. Or someone would find him driving the cat. Dave would lose his job. He'd get arrested. Danilo would hear about it too late. Or there'd be nothing he could do. Nothing he *would* do while he was trying to get through the winter. He would never see Leo again. He'd end up somewhere else. Dumped on the other side of that line, left to start over. And Lulu would be alone in Los Angeles. Or maybe Vicky would still be around making her bad lasagna and changing the color of her eyes. Eduardo hoped so. He hoped that, whatever happened, one day he'd find them at the table eating dinner together, the doors locked, both of them in their socks, the pink light flaring to the west, her foot resting on his. Even if they weren't talking much.

He stayed because he felt as if he were being carried along, as if he'd stopped making decisions. Someday he'd be deposited in a place where nothing moved and nothing changed.

The morning he was to go out alone he drank a cup of instant coffee at the kitchen counter in the dark. Then he walked to the base of the mountain and hiked up the few hundred yards and waited. Dave came from the bar, punched in at midnight, pulled the cat out, drove it up to Eduardo, and snapped off the lights.

"You ready?"

Dave jumped out of the cab. The engine was loud.

Eduardo nodded.

"Okay. She's all yours."

Eduardo climbed in and pulled the door closed. He slid the window open and looked down. He could see Dave's black bow tie beneath his parka.

"Any problems, you call me."

He reached up and handed Eduardo his cell phone.

"Okay, buddy. Go to it. I'll see you right here at three."

He knocked the door of the cat three times with his fist, turned, and took off at a jog.

Eduardo waited. A quarter moon waning in the east. Again he had the impression of floating in the landscape, nothing fixed, nothing still. The runs were blue. The trees purple and black. The darkest gray. He turned on the lights, lowered the blade, swung the machine from behind the trees and out onto the long run that would take him upward.

Through the open window he could feel cold air against his face. As the pitch steepened the engine rose an octave. He kept the machine straight and watched the rough snow disappear beneath him. The blade cut through ridges, hunks of ice, the tiller flattened it, turned it all to lines. He drove higher and higher. The air went colder. The radio noise came and went. Static squelched and cut and stuttered. He turned it off. He could feel gravity driving through him. Pushing him back against the seat. He sailed on, making a long, slow, rising turn. He brought the blade up to adjust for grade, weighted the tiller, and kept climbing.

He came up over a high ridge. He came up higher, passing the tree line, and brought the machine up to the very summit. He made the start of a wide, sweeping turn. And then he stopped it. He was pointed northwest. He flipped off the lights. The engine thrummed beneath him. He heard the rocks clattering against the truck bed. He saw the chalk line snap tight. He saw her sitting against a wall, jaw set, rain coming down, a deck of cards, playing gin for gravel. He thought of his father—a memory absent image, absent sense. He saw himself in that great idling machine so far and so high above the valley. The sky was endless. The mountains were endless. They rose and fell like waves. The troughs so dark, the crests the bluest white, and everywhere he looked was water. ■

NEW BOOKS

By Jane Smiley



Since *Don Quixote*, the essential subject of the novel has been geography: what is out there, who lives there, how they are different from characters who live in other landscapes. Themes are always particular to place; style, too, derives its piquancy from dialect and locale. Three new novels extend this tradition, but they are as remarkably different from one another as the landscapes they explore.

The **GOOD KIDS** of Benjamin Nugent's debut (Scribner, \$23, simonandschuster.com) are never not aware of their self-consciously counter-culture environment, a liberal college town in Massachusetts where on Language Day at the high school, Josh, who takes Russian, sells borscht a few feet from where Khadijah (who owes her first name to her mother's "Sufi years") sells mousse (she studies French). After the festival the kids go to the ethnic-grocery store, Gaia, and witness their parents Linus and Nancy kissing in the

candy aisle. This revelation is soon followed by two divorces ("People don't hold it against you if you get divorced in Watsbury"). The unexpected connection at first gives Josh and Khadijah a sense of fellowship and then pulls them apart after Nancy and her husband break up.

Nancy moves to Cambridge, taking Khadijah; Josh and his father move to New York City. "Most of my friends from high school," Josh remarks, "wound up in either Boston or Brooklyn, depending on whether their salient ambition was to be smart or to be cool." Among the many things Josh holds against his father is that Linus blames parenthood for his own failure to follow his dream, which was to move to France and write essays in the tradition of Montaigne. Instead of doing that, Linus takes up with Allison (whose father funds Linus's nonprofit), finds an apartment in TriBeCa, and eats macrobiotic take-out while Josh practices guitar riffs

by day and hunts for "a future Patti Smith and a future Patti Smith Group" at a "bar or at an unsanitary party or in the apartment of a rich, pervy benefactor" by night. Josh understands that he is some combination of shallow and nerdy—he cannot make friends, and the few times he socializes he "would monologue about the way reverb functioned in an Olivia Tremor Control song, or about the varieties of Sonic Youth T-shirts designed in North Carolina by Tannis Root."

Every day in Nugent's novel is Language Day. Josh labels himself shallow because he can't help being swept up by the ways people express themselves (and Nugent has an excellent ear for the clashing notes of our popular cacophony). Of L.A., Josh observes:

I liked how whorish it was, how fast. And when I arrived in Los Angeles, driving the lead wagon west, sun-dazzled, sweating in my Cat Power T-shirt, the city lived up to a shocking number of clichés regarding whorishness and speed and commerce and art, because so many people, like me, had just arrived and were determined to make it live up to those clichés.

Josh's band achieves modest success when one of its tracks finds an audience; soon Josh's style takes on a frenetic rhythm that is comic, anxious, doomed, and filled with brands, hip spots, nervous nicknames, edgy observations. People locate themselves as soon as they meet—not by saying where they live but by saying what they prefer. "Gordon says you're indie rock. You should know: I'm not into that. Everybody's like, 'Neutral Milk Hotel. Fuckin' Wilco.' Ich. I like Jennifer Lopez and Destiny's Child."



Josh sometimes worries that he has gotten over Khadijah and sometimes worries that he hasn't. The answer might be Julie, star of a science-channel show, *Julie vs. Animals*, but maybe not—as Josh and Julie, standing at their house's adjoining bathroom sinks, get ready for yet another party, Josh looks into the mirror: "I saw a twenty-eight-year-old and a twenty-nine-year-old assessing the persistence of youth's afterglow in their faces. I saw a couple calculating its worth in the eyes of the world." Josh has felt the eyes of the world for as long as he can remember—in Massachusetts, in New York, in L.A. For him, these places exist as styles of rhetoric and self-presentation; they are places that, as Josh comes to understand, prevent him from locating himself in the real world.

In LAKE PEOPLE (Knopf, \$24.95, aaknopf.com), Abi Maxwell also gives a nod to a certain counter-culture; Cici, from whom Maxwell's protagonist, Alice, inherits a cabin on an island in a New Hampshire lake, is a former hippie who mysteriously appears in a small town "dressed in brighter clothing than anyone else from around here wore." Maxwell's landscape, though, is not modern culture but traditional folklore. We learn that the first of Alice's ancestors in America was Eleanora: "She came alone from Sweden as a teenager, and by the time she arrived, she had faced some terrible trouble, and by the end of her life her trouble had not ended." As in many Scandinavian novels, if a bad outcome is possible, it is inevitable. Eleanora's daughter, Ida, is the first to drown, then her sons; then Eleanora goes "wild on that wild island." Alice's life begins with what looks like a curse—she is a foundling, left in a canoe floating beside a dock. Her father has been killed in a car accident; her mother has run away. Her father's family, wealthy enough to take her in, refuses to do so. (Later, she will be abandoned for a third time by her adoptive mother.)

The natural world in Maxwell's novel is perverse:

But now I have heard the call. . . . It does indeed sound like a loon, but the sound is, apart from all else, carried across the water and delivered to the

listener in the softest of hands. As it travels, it splits the air open, so that only that call remains—stark and final and brilliant—and its listener can do nothing but float toward it.

And people offer no protection or solace. At sixteen, Alice is raped by an acquaintance of her father's who later commits suicide. The only female friend she develops exploits her and threatens her by turns (the woman herself is regularly imprisoned and abused by her husband). Alice's first boyfriend takes her away from the lake, to the hills. When he pushes her down the stairs it may be on purpose, and it may be because she is pregnant. Secrets are kept, secrets are told: no one ever fails to remind Alice that her background is suspect, her very existence a source of pain. In such an environment, she must find some method of embracing the world that will diminish its power. Her primary strategy is to employ a style of thought and discourse that turns experiences into myths and locales into symbols (Lake Country, Hill Country, The Village). When it comes to details of light and landscape, Alice is beautifully precise:

The ice was thick as an old maple, yet Ida had scarcely walked twenty steps upon it when the lake opened its mouth. First her feet dropped under, and then her hips came forward, in one slow, consenting wave. Her arms swept upward, and then, without sound, Ida dropped into the winter of the lake.

With CLAY (Bloomsbury, \$24, bloomsbury.com), English novelist Melissa Harrison effortlessly inserts her modern dystopian tale of loneliness and urban decay into the history of English landscape writing, which includes such disparate sensibilities as Wordsworth, Hardy, and T. H. White. Harrison's bit of nature is a small park near a high road in an un-



named industrial city. A few people enjoy the "common," especially a Polish immigrant, Jozef, who works in a used-furniture shop and ruminates on his lost farm; and a widow, Sophia, who lives in a disintegrating housing estate even though her well-off daughter, Linda, wants her to move. "They had even offered to find her a little garden flat nearby—at considerable expense—but the old woman wouldn't budge." Sophia's granddaughter, Daisy, age nine, prefers the park to her toys ("they were mostly pink, and they were all boring"), as does a child, TC, whose father has left, whose mother neglects him, and who skips school to investigate the flora and the fauna of the park. TC first befriends Jozef on his quest to assuage his curiosity about the natural world:

He decided to find out every single thing that lived there, so he could take care of it all. Already he'd seen black-birds and robins and squirrels skittering crabwise up the trunks of trees, and he could hear a woodpecker drumming.

Jozef soon realizes that TC is hungry, and he starts taking him to the shop where he works and giving him food.

All these characters live inside the tension that is modern English life. Jozef knows that kindness toward TC will be viewed with suspicion by authorities and parents; Sophia's love for her granddaughter must be mediated through Linda, who always preferred her father and resents her mother for a host of barely articulated reasons. The park itself, though well tended (Jozef eventually goes to work for the maintenance crew, and Sophia at one point replants all the daffodil bulbs so that they will grow in more graceful, less orderly groups), is the scene of a frightening episode of adolescent violence. The connections Harrison's characters make are fleeting, and the ways in which they are broken are both poignant and unjust (after Daisy disobeys her mother and runs off to the common on her own, Linda blames Sophia, and Sophia loses Daisy).

But Harrison's structure—chapters are named for the traditional English calendar, starting and ending with "St Bartholomew's Day," passing through "Shrovetide," "Haymaking," and "Pag Rag Day"—asserts that nature endures. Even Linda, whose life takes place on

the road, eventually pulls over and goes for a walk:

It came to her from somewhere that felt like childhood that these [shoots] were bluebells, and that in a couple of months this tiny, forgotten corner of woodland would be a paradise, the cars speeding by unheeding as the

wood performed a miracle entirely of its own making.

The traffic on the motorway is in the end “inconsequential” compared to “the ancient contours of the land ... which would persist long after the roads had gone.” ■

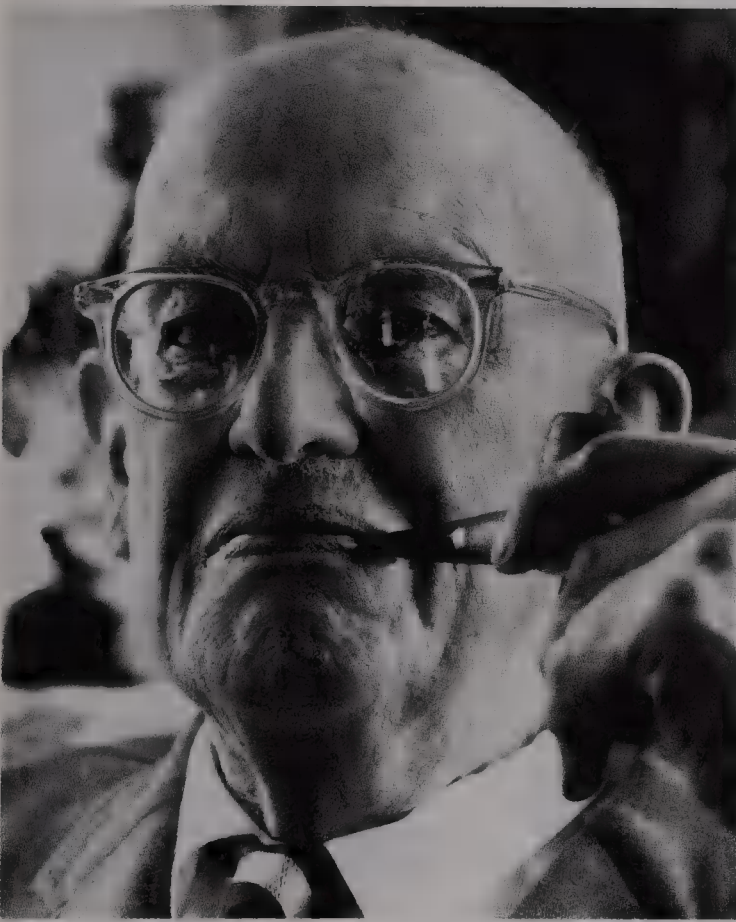
NOTHING SERIOUS

P. G. Wodehouse and the costs of innocence

By Pico Iyer

Discussed in this essay:

P. G. Wodehouse: *A Life in Letters*, edited by Sophie Ratcliffe. W. W. Norton. 624 pages. \$35. wwnorton.com.



ten minutes to pack, “Plum,” as his wife Ethel had it, “went off with a copy of Shakespeare, a pair of pajamas, and a mutton chop.” Interned by the Nazis in a former lunatic asylum in Upper Silesia, the writer of stories about Lady Betty Bootle and Beefy Bingham reported that prison camp was “rather like being on the road with a theatrical company.” It was also “like being at Hollywood.” Most of all, he suggested, it was like being at his beloved all-boys school, Dulwich, again. After a twenty-seven-year hiatus, he was, as he

wrote to Bill Townend, a good friend from school, able to play cricket once more. He turned his camp mates into characters and abridged a story for the internees’ newspaper.

In reality, as the editor of his letters, the Oxford don Sophie Ratcliffe, reminds us, the writer was shunted from camp to camp in “crowded cattle

trucks full of human excrement.” He shared a room with twenty other men and made a soup bowl from a disused motor-oil can. In the course of the ordeal, Wodehouse, approaching the age of fifty-nine when imprisoned, lost more than sixty pounds. Still, “am quite happy here and have thought out new novel,” he wrote by Prisoner of War Post to his agent on Fifth Avenue. He completed four novels during the war, including the aptly titled *Joy in the Morning*.

Finding himself in Berlin in 1943, where on one occasion nearly 300 aircraft bombed the city in a single night, Wodehouse wrote to a German friend, “One good result of the raid is that two dinner engagements which we had have been cancelled!” He might have been completing a book, half satiric and half disarmingly sincere, entitled “How to Be an Intern and Love It.” He was certainly exemplifying the values extolled by his near contemporary, the great laureate of empire Rudyard Kipling: “If you can keep your head when all about you/Are losing theirs ... If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster/ And treat those two impostors just the same ... you’ll be a Man, my son!”

Fearful, in 1941, that it might seem “ungrateful and ungracious” not to reply to the many kind and solicitous letters he’d received from fans in America—he was allowed to write only to family—Wodehouse agreed to record five humorous stories on German radio. Their theme was, as it happened, “How to Be an Intern and Love It.” The innocent—this is the comic subtext of much of Wodehouse’s fiction—cannot imagine the use less innocent hands will make of them.

The Germans, initially hoping to deploy the broadcasts to keep America out of the war, later suggested that the obliging British author was a Nazi sympathizer. They continued to play his droll sketches long after the full extent of Hitler’s atrocities was widely known—and long after Wodehouse had begun to regret his mistake. They sent the broadcasts to England, where they knew the consequences would be inflammatory. Wodehouse’s books were banned in Northern Ireland and pulped in Britain. “We would prefer not ever to hear about him again,”

When a German soldier marched into P. G. Wodehouse’s home in France, in 1940, and gave the distinguished author

Pico Iyer is a Distinguished Presidential Fellow at Chapman University. His latest book, *The Man Within My Head*, about Graham Greene and British boarding schools, came out in paperback in January.

wrote Winston Churchill in 1944, even as he expressed the hope that Wodehouse would not be jailed. "His name stinks here."

The whole sad episode was an example of the enduring lesson of the Wodehouse universe: A boy eternal can flourish only by keeping the outside world at a safe distance. It was also a reminder that the very values Wodehouse had so faithfully embodied were ever more out of step with the post-imperial order. "It seemed to me," he wrote, in wounded bewilderment, to his agent,

that I was doing something mildly courageous and praiseworthy in showing that it was possible, even though in a prison camp, to keep one's end up and not bellyache.

Keeping one's end up and holding to the tenets of the Stoics—"If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken/Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools," as Kipling put it—were what had kept the British Empire on top of the world for so long.

The desk had always been Wodehouse's safe place, one realizes in reading the letters; there, blithe as Bertie Wooster, he could place every tempest within a teapot. His stories continue to hold so many of us precisely because—as their maker readily acknowledged—they offer a land where the only things to be feared are aunts with designs, young women bearing copies of Nietzsche, and the latest *coups de foudre* of Gussie Fink-Nottle and Pongo Twistleton. They give us our world on its best days, and as it may appear to outsiders. But the sorrow of Wodehouse's life was that the very buoyancy and serenity that so lit up a page could make him seem thoughtless or even callous in worlds less cloudless than those of Blandings Castle and Jeeves.

What are the costs of innocence—and how should innocence proceed in a compromised world? These are the central questions raised by P. G. Wodehouse: *A Life in Letters*. How does comedy, in the wrong hands, turn to tragedy? Robert McCrum, in his penetrating and fair-minded 2004 biography, *Wodehouse* (dedicated, as it happens, to my own boarding-school

headmaster, McCrum's father), probed into Wodehouse's defenses and gift for elusiveness, but the letters allow us to see things from the other side. They carry us, with almost unceasing charm and high spirits, through two world wars, constant exile, a sixty-year marriage to a twice-widowed chorus girl, and the effective transfer of power from the British Empire to Hollywood. It's typical of Wodehouse that he answered every fan letter he received, wrote without fail to his grandchildren on every birthday, and, even when trying to live on "powdered soup" for a week, asked constantly how his loved ones were doing. Above all, while moving between England, New York City, France, and California, he kept up with his old friend Townend, a pale, would-be Wodehousian writer, sending him plot points, sharing with him advances, and working to find him commissions.

Pelham Grenville Wodehouse was born to parents living in Hong Kong, where his father commanded the Chinese section of the police force, though he was sent back to England alone at the age of three to be "passed from hand to hand" among fifteen uncles and twenty aunts. He claimed, characteristically, that he "always accepted everything that happens to me in a philosophical spirit; and I can't remember ever having been unhappy in those days." But when as a teenager he encountered his mother, he "met her as virtually a stranger and it was not easy to establish cordial relations." The death of his father when Wodehouse was forty-seven is not once mentioned in his surviving correspondence.

School, with its emphasis on games, its steadying routines, its equal cherishing of work and the impression of not working at all, thus became his family, his home, and his community. School also gave Wodehouse almost everything he ever wrote about. His first published essay, called "Some Aspects of Game Captaincy," appeared in *The Public School Magazine* when he was eighteen; turning to light journalism in his early twenties, he soon began writing fiction about school, an effort that culminated in a dandyish Old Etonian known as Psmith.

"I sometimes feel as if I were a case of infantilism," he wrote to Townend

in his fifties. "I haven't developed mentally at all since my last year at school. All my ideas and ideals are the same." Till the end of his days, Wodehouse went through the whole of Shakespeare every year, seeded his stories with allusions to Aristophanes and Keats, and labored over his tales of Chuffys and Bingos as if crafting exquisite ships inside bottles. Raymond Chandler—who went through Dulwich around the same time, inheriting the same code of gallantry and bachelor self-sufficiency, the same Victorian sense of rectitude—would send his alter ego, Philip Marlowe, out into a world in which he is forever tilting at those playing by less gentlemanly rules. Wodehouse—who moved to New York City at twenty-two and put American gangsters and English schoolboys together to very different effect—decided to stay in the world he knew, expressing impatience with those writers (from Henry James to George Orwell) who he thought exceeded their bounds, largely by taking themselves too seriously.

Reading the letters, you can see how much of Wodehouse there is in the unfallen and unencumbered character of Bertie Wooster, right down to Wodehouse's references to "the manly spirit of the Wodehouses (descended from the sister of Anne Boleyn)"—as they really were—and his way of deflating his own annoyance, even as he got it out, by referring to how "blighted some blighters can be when they decide to be blighters." The central difference between the author and his character is that writing was for Wodehouse what idling is for Bertie; whereas Wooster complains about being got up when it's "barely ten" and being kept from a day of doing nothing at the Drones Club, Wodehouse springs up and does exercises every day at first light—even on the train taking him to an internment camp—and devotes nearly all his waking hours to savoring Bertie's ease vicariously. At one point he installed two typewriters in his home so he'd never have to stop writing.

What the letters also reveal—whether in brisk messages to editors or workmanlike fretting over plots—is how strong a drive lay beneath the air

of nonchalance; even in his earliest years, Wodehouse seemed convinced of his literary greatness and pursued it with a terrier's tenacity, scheming, negotiating, working, and revising, though without a trace of rancor. Listen to the aspiring writer even in his teens: "Friend of me boyhood," he begins, to a chum,

here's some dread news for you. My people have not got enough of what are vulgarly but forcibly called "stamps" to send me to Varsity. Damn the last owed is wot I know you will say. Oh! money, money, thy name is money! (a most lucid remark). I am going into the Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank. For two yrs I will be in England from the time I am 19. So I will have two yrs to establish myself on a pinnacle of fame as a writer.

The fact that his father realized at the last minute that he couldn't afford to send Wodehouse to Oxford is said to be one of the crowning disappointments of the young man's life; but Wodehouse's response is to give his friend quasi-heroic diction (Wodehouse had of his own accord read Pope's *Iliad* at the age of six), to use language as a way of dancing past the hurt and, most unexpectedly, to reaffirm a strong sense of literary destiny barely concealed by the reflexive self-mockery. Not long thereafter, he could be found approaching—successfully—the agent who represented Joseph Conrad, D. H. Lawrence, Henry James, Edith Wharton, and James Joyce; when confined to his bed with mumps, in 1901, he turned out nineteen short stories. It's astonishing to see how Wodehouse, starting out, is already announcing how much his fiction will be worth "when I am a great man." On moving to New York, where his stories fetched many times more than in London, in 1909, he was eager to conceal the existence of his early books, fearing that "they would kill my chances of doing anything big. I don't want people here to know me as a writer of school stories. I want to butt into the big league."

His productivity was as staggering as his almost instant success: even when employed full-time by Hollywood (Samuel Goldwyn had hired him, as part of his campaign to recruit famous writers, in 1929), he exclaimed, "I have written three short stories, an act of a play, and the dialogue for a picture in three weeks, and have got six brand new plots for short stories!!!" Another letter notes, "I shall have five plays running in New York in the Autumn, possibly

six," before breaking into a long disquisition on dogs. Yet Wodehouse never evinces much stress at the activity; he all but suggests that the real stress would come in *not* being allowed to write.

In later years he would complain, "I started writing about Bertie Wooster and comic Earls because I was in America and couldn't write American stories and the only English characters the American public would

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read about were exaggerated dudes.” He had introduced Jeeves—named after a British cricketer—in a story in 1916 and combined him to powerful effect with his latest idling aristocrat, Bertie Wooster, in the early 1920s. Certainly the letters remind us how canny Wodehouse was in assessing both English and American markets. The paradoxes of his ways are confounding only if you don’t appreciate the code of the professional amateur (for American counterparts, see William F. Buckley Jr. and his son, Christopher).

With bumptious delight Wodehouse often remarked on how brilliant one of his pieces was; but as he also routinely acknowledged, “I have only got one plot and produce it once a year with variations.” He became tremendously rich through his dependably lovable writing—in 1937, *Ladies’ Home Journal* offered him \$45,000 to rework a book “about a young bachelor getting saddled with some kids”—but once told Townend that all he truly needed was “about two real friends, a regular supply of books, and a Peke.” He berated an agent for doing him out of \$1,250 in commissions, yet sent money to Townend all his life while asking him not to tell his wife about it. This mix of eagerness and insouciance (his sovereign value) makes one feel that life was for Wodehouse a game of Monopoly, and one he was determined to win. He could note that “we always did have too much money” while peppering his letters with news of how he “got a cheque for \$18,000 (my record) on the following Tuesday!!!”

It says something about the man that there is not a single mention of a girlfriend in the letters; even in his thirties, he often pronounced—as many a product of English boys’ schools might—that “one’s real friendships are never with [women].” Yet after he met Ethel Wayman, a high-spirited and gregarious English actress, in 1914 in New York, he married her within weeks and quickly became the most uxorious of husbands, as well as the most devoted of stepfathers to her daughter, Leonora. The only thing that regularly seemed to throw him off his stride was when Ethel, from whom he was rarely separated, fell ill.

Wodehouse’s work may look like a feat of inspired fantasy to readers today,

but to anyone who’s lived through the world he’s evoking (and remembering), it reads like straightforward realism. One of my own school friends wrote me a brilliantly entertaining letter not so long ago, elegant and rich with hilarious accounts of his pratfalls and failures of comprehension. Only at the very end did he note that his six-year-old daughter had just been diagnosed with a brain tumor. Another friend I studied with, from the age of five through university, recently sent me an email pulsing with literary and cinematic judgments. In a p.s. I almost missed, he reported that, at fifty-four, he had just gotten married for the first time, to a woman he’d never mentioned.

A post-Freudian looking at Wodehouse begins to talk of repression and denial; a pre-Freudian simply notes that someone like Wodehouse may have had relatively little to repress or deny, especially since he had early learned how to come to terms with difficulty, got paid terrifically well for what he loved and knew how to do, and surrounded himself with hobbies and people he adored. As Bertie Wooster says, adapting the Stoics’ creed to life’s most constant threat: “In this life it is not aunts that matter but the courage which one brings to them.”

How you feel about psychology—and complication—will clearly determine how well you get on with Wodehouse, in life or on the page. Bertie Wooster often remarks, with wonder, on Jeeves’s command of “the psychology of the individual,” and it is this practical faculty that unlocks most of Bertie’s problems; but it’s Bertie’s freedom from introspection and any acknowledgment of real pain that gives the work its rare atmosphere of sunlight and sweetness. At one point, Wodehouse counseled Townend to confer less psychological depth on his characters: it was good for engaging interest, he conceded, but could easily drown out a plot and diminish the audience’s sense of entertainment. It isn’t hard to imagine he might have been talking to—and about—himself, and the character he so seamlessly kept up, known to the world as P. G. Wodehouse.

His own sense of buoyancy had been reinforced, the letters remind us,

by his constant work on musical comedies. It was Wodehouse (who collaborated at various times with Jerome Kern, the Gershwins, Cole Porter, and others) who wrote the pregnant lines: “Put all your troubles in a great big box/ And lock it with a great big key.” Making little of great things and much of little (“I’ve just discovered a hole in my trousers. These are Life’s Tragedies”) is how certain Englishmen are trained, even now, to get through the travails of the world. In 1934, as the IRS was trying to extract \$250,000 out of Wodehouse (over the years some of his disputes over taxes went all the way to the Supreme Court), he wrote: “My relations with U.S. Government continue distant. I am now rather in the stage of hitching my shoulder petulantly and saying nasty things about them in a falsetto voice.” He even went so far as to say he was grateful for the contretemps because “Everything was so easy for me before that I was getting a bit bored.”

Such blitheness could come across as blindness—or something worse. One of the “great English experts on Eden,” as Auden put it, could never fully appreciate how people might take things outside the Garden. When MGM began paying him more than \$2,000 a week “to insert Class and what-not” into scripts, Wodehouse told several friends, and then the *Los Angeles Times*, that he had been paid \$104,000 “for loafing” and that “I feel as if I have cheated [the studios].” Needless to say, this did not go over well with his bosses or the newspaper’s readers (this was in 1931, at the start of the Great Depression); MGM decided not to renew his contract. (True to the contours of his generally charmed life, though, Wodehouse was such a reliable professional that the studio came begging to hire him back just five years later.)

This was not the first time Wodehouse had come across as tone-deaf. His only on-the-record comment concerning World War I, Ratcliffe informs us, was one to the *New York Times* contending that the “tragedy of war” would have a great effect on the British public’s attitude toward humor. He had also, in ominous anticipation of his miscalculations in the next war, brightly asserted, in 1914, “I don’t

believe in these Zeppelins. If they ever got to London, they couldn't do so very much damage." Even the occasional "dirty story" he passes on in his letters is almost shockingly boyish: A man picks up a girl and she turns out to be his aunt!

Wodehouse's innocence was, no doubt, why he was so needed; as T. S. Eliot, one of his many literary admirers, wrote after seeing what war had wreaked in England, "Human kind/ Cannot bear very much reality." But it also meant that it was near fatal for Wodehouse to venture out of his self-protected world. "He is about the world's worst person with newspaper reporters," his agent once noted; when Oxford gave him an honorary degree, in 1939, he was terrified that he might be asked to make a speech (he was, and he said, "Thank you," then sat down). The sangfroid he aspired to, and on which Bertie congratulates himself so often, was one of those virtues much of the world was leaving behind.

It was perhaps inevitable that World War II should bring this clash of systems to a climax. Wodehouse was most upset—as he wrote to the British Foreign Office—that many thought he might have agreed to record the broadcasts as a way out of camp. In fact, he was released as he drew close to sixty, as others had been. Later recalling his "criminally foolish" blunder, Wodehouse was unsparing on himself. "I can't very well pose as a completely innocent injured person," he wrote to Townend as they prepared a book of the letters they'd exchanged over almost five decades. Yet even as he worked and worked to try to find the best way of acknowledging his "insane" error, he kept getting the tone all wrong. "Comedy," he despaired, "will keep creeping in."

The question that haunts the letters is to what extent Wodehouse saw them as a kind of performance, part of his civic duty to put a brave face on things, jolly everyone along, and never give in to self-pity. At one point, referring to the farces he'd turned out in wartime, he likens himself to "a red-nosed comedian ... outwardly breezy and cheerful but feeling inside as if he had swallowed a heaping tablespoonful of butterflies."

Earlier he had written, "We all act through life, and each of us selects the special audience he wishes to impress." The shrewd craftsman seemed to be slipping out from under the tootling golfer in plus fours. A profile writer once recorded encountering "the most friendly, genial, likeable manner in the world." It's striking that he used the word "manner" and not "man."

Yet the effect of Wodehouse's belief that agonizing over a problem was not infallibly the way to solve it was a startling freedom from malice. The tireless novelist grew a little crotchety in his seventies and started to attack critics who had given him bad reviews, but even then we also see him writing a fan letter to the head writer of the soap opera *Edge of Night*, walking "my five or six miles a day," and inviting his most brutal critic from during the war to lunch—then proceeding to become "bosom pals" with him.

As it happened, he wrote in a letter, the U.S. War Department had used his broadcasts from German camp at the U.S. Army Intelligence School as an example of anti-Nazi propaganda. A German double agent who reported on him to MI5 described Wodehouse as "entirely childlike and pacifist." He was finally publicly exonerated of every charge of treason in 1980, five years after his death, but by then many people realized that he was guilty only, in a sense, of keeping his upper lip stiff.

In 1941, when Wodehouse's name suddenly became unwelcome in many quarters, the Royal Librarian revealed that the queen had ordered eighteen books for her teenage daughter, Elizabeth, heir to the throne; all eighteen were by Wodehouse. Thirty-four years later, when Wodehouse died, at ninety-three, on Valentine's Day, he had beside him a book in progress and a knighthood conferred, six weeks earlier, by Queen Elizabeth II. "I have always endeavored to give satisfaction," he declared in his nineties—and though that impulse came with shadows he didn't much care to explore, you can hear in the statement both the industrious, proper, and dependable voice of Reginald Jeeves and the unbeatable innocence of the last of the Woosters. Here, it's hard not to feel, was one who trusted not wisely but too well. ■

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RAKE'S PROGRESS

Adult animation grows up with *Archer*

By Charles Bock

Discussed in this essay:

Archer. FX. Thursdays 10:00 P.M. EST.



The Simpson family is hightailing it away from a murderously intentioned Sideshow Bob. Having attached himself to the underside of their car, Bob endures speed bumps, scalding coffee, and an unexpected detour ("Hey kids," says Homer, "want to drive through that cactus patch?"). The Simpsons make it to the idyllic haven of Terror Lake and walk off to their new houseboat home; now a bruised Bob crawls out from beneath the vehicle, pulls himself upright, takes a step, and—a pole pops up and smacks him between the eyes: he's stepped on a rake. Bob, as

Charles Bock is the author of the novel *Beautiful Children*, which won the Sue Kaufman Prize for First Fiction from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. His article "For Love or Money" appeared in the June 2011 issue.

much in long-suffering pique as in pain, emits a low grumble. He turns around and is promptly smacked in the face by another rake. A wide shot from above reveals Sideshow Bob surrounded by thirteen scattered rakes. He steps on another, takes the hit, grumbling: "Mmrreurrgrh." Three paces straight ahead and Bob steps on another, "Mmrreurrgrh." A bit of Seventies porno editing: the first rake smack plays again, as if it's a new rake, for the sequence's fifth smack, the whole loop getting under way in repeat. A solid thirty seconds after Bob emerges from under that car, we cut at last to Marge and Homer inside the houseboat. Audible is the distant impact of the ninth rake.

"The reason there are so many," explains producer Al Jean on the DVD commentary track for Season 5,

was ... the show was short. I was editing ... and I said, "How can it still be twenty freaking seconds short?" So I said, you know, "Add a couple more rakes hitting him." That was a little longer, but it wasn't long enough. So Sam [Simon, one of the show runners] had said, "You know, when something's funny, and then you do it so much it's not funny, if you keep doing it, it might get really funny." So we just said, "Let's just go for broke and put in as many as we possibly can."

There were, to be sure, precedents: the beans-around-the-campfire scene in *Blazing Saddles*, or Monty Python's Lancelot endlessly charging toward Swamp Castle. Still, when the Rake Scene appeared on October 7, 1993, televised comedies weren't doing humor where the degree of repetition, the overlong extension of the joke, was the joke. That scene, though cobbled together as filler, instantly became one of the most memorable moments of what is now the longest-running sitcom on television. Moreover, it tapped into a current: something was afoot on Bob's giant floppy clown feet. That same something has lately completed a strange journey, now shod in the fine black cordovan loafers of a superspy named Sterling Malory Archer.

The Simpsons' "Cape Feare" episode—the one with the Rake Scene—aired during a spectacular five-year run (Seasons 2 through 6) in which the show, while transforming Fox into a real network, was consistently as funny and refreshing and innovative as anything in the history of broadcast television (one staff writer compared his first time in the writers' room to visiting one of the stations of the cross). The debut season was straightforward, a brightly colored specimen of the conservative, middle-class nuclear sitcom family of the Eighties, but gone a bit off the rails (George H. W. Bush promised to "make American families a lot more like the Waltons and a lot less like the Simpsons"). But after that first season's success (it broke into the Nielsen top twenty during its thirteen-episode run), as characters became established, the writing staff began to make more ambitious assumptions about their



audience's pop literacy, employing layered references to classic cinema and genre films and Broadway musicals and other television shows, as well as jaundiced cameos by celebrity guest stars announced with a wide-eyed "That's a good question, Bono," or "Hey, kids, it's Sideshow Luke Perry!" By Season 4, not only had Homer the clueless paterfamilias replaced Bart and his don't-have-a-cow-man petulance as the show's fulcrum but *The Simpsons* had permanently colonized the territory of the absurd and freewheeling, the family dynamic having revealed itself as a vehicle for exploring, parodying, subverting, and affectionately thumbing a nose at the show's true subject: pop culture itself.

The same year "Cape Feare" aired, David Foster Wallace published an essay in which he commented on how irony—formerly a weapon of the avant-garde—had been co-opted by corporate America: Isuzu winking at itself with a lying salesman named Joe Isuzu, so we'd remember the name. "The next real literary 'rebels' in this country might well emerge as some weird bunch of *anti*-rebels, born oglers who dare somehow to back away from ironic watching," Wallace argued. "Who eschew self-consciousness and hip fatigue."

Wallace sensed that undercurrent wherein smart young adults who'd grown up on popular culture, and who now considered it their canon, were not simply aware of and charmed by and fluent in its forms but also exhausted by those forms, distrustful of them. Which didn't mean slackers were going to stop consuming, commenting on, or making references to pop; and they assuredly weren't discovering the golden hues of the sincerity for which Wallace eloquently pined, or eschewing any kind of ironic anything. *The Onion*'s deadpan generic AP-style headlines ("Death Star to Open Day Care Center"; "Scissors Defeats Rock") were finding an audience in cities and college towns (though the paper was not yet successful enough to pay its writing staff salaries); *Seinfeld* had devoted a chunk of its fourth season to a plotline in which Jerry and George develop an NBC pilot for a show about nothing. And in 1996, pop's ironizing self-consciousness cranked into high gear with *Scream*—a movie whose masked killer consciously employs tropes of teen slasher films in order to slash teens.

In New York City, meanwhile, on Monday nights at the Lower East Side's Luna Lounge, cast members of

Saturday Night Live, *MADtv*, and MTV's short-lived but seminal sketch-comedy show *The State*—and such emerging comedians as Janeane Garofalo, Marc Maron, and Sarah Silverman—were performing stand-up and skits for audiences in semi-organized evenings that the *New York Times* called a reaction to "the tyranny of the punch line," a kind of collective striving for honesty and originality in a profession glutted with mediocre cable-TV stand-up and ossified by jokes about airplane peanuts. There was one rule at the Luna Lounge: no previously performed material allowed. Nobody got paid. Sets were freer (obviously); their lack of form could lead to rambling and, often, to a kind of searching: Maron was described by *Times* reporter Neil Strauss as performing "ideas as much as jokes," Silverman as attempting "to salvage a difficult night by delivering her neurotic monologue with her pants around her ankles." One recent arrival was the now ubiquitous Zach Galifianakis, who'd performed for the first time at the Lounge just two weeks earlier; the young comedian was quoted as hoping to see a fusion between alternative and mainstream comedy.

"Anticomedry" was a term that got tossed around.

In anticomedie both comedian and audience implicitly acknowledge the traditional, tyrannical set-it-up/knock-it-down mechanics of a joke. Only now the joke's punch line sabotages its setup, and this subversion ends up getting the laugh. The joke, again, is on the joke itself. Anticomedie often involves dramatic leaps of logic and can venture into unsettling territory. Fore-runners include Andy Kaufman's almost-performance-art pieces; David Letterman's early, monkey-cam-loving, bowling-ball-off-a-building-tossing late-night years; the affectless stonerific one-liners of Steven Wright. You can consider *This Is Spinal Tap* as anticomedie.

Joke:

What's worse than finding a worm in
your apple?
Finding half a worm.

Antijoke:

What's worse than finding a worm in
your apple?
The Holocaust.

In 1994, *Cheers* was still the dominant model for sitcoms. *Friends*—pretty people declaiming safe, snappy lines—was the kind of show guaranteed to get a push. But mainstream entertainment was at the same time playing with an ever more expansive and elastic self-reflexivity, thanks not only to *The Simpsons* but also to *The Larry Sanders Show* and, of course, that film in which John Travolta and Samuel L. Jackson banter about what you call a Quarter Pounder with Cheese in Paris. More animated comedies were being green-lighted, many of them also revolving around pop culture: MTV's *Beavis and Butt-Head* offered cynical metacommentary on an MTV-spawned generation of morons, *Dr. Katz, Professional Therapist* juxtaposed a middle-aged shrink's sessions treating comedians with his relationship with his adult son. Animated movies traditionally had been made with enough grown-up laughs to save parents from aneurysmal boredom; these new shows appealed squarely to that all-important demographic of twelve- to seventeen-year-olds and its disproportionate spending clout, to knowing undergrads and exhausted grad students, to untold num-

bers of fully grown men and women (but mostly men) stuck in perpetual or arrested states of development.

South Park, which debuted in 1997, took aim—as had *The Simpsons*—at the idiocy of a popular culture that its creators were (and are) nevertheless obviously in love with. But *The Simpsons* was essentially good-natured; the wonderfully specific dynamics of late-Nineties suburban childhood and the looser rules of basic cable, on the other hand, empowered *South Park* to go for broke, as when fourth grader Eric Cartman tricks an older boy, Scott Tenorman, into eating chili made from Scott's freshly killed parents ("Oh, let me taste your tears, Scott! ... The tears of unfathomable sadness! Mmm, yummy!"). While *South Park*'s main characters remain, like *The Simpsons*', essentially static, the show's creators, Trey Parker and Matt Stone, have adjusted, as *The Simpsons* did, by introducing and fleshing out supporting characters. With age, *South Park* also has unavoidably begun to give off the odor of a known quantity—though Parker and Stone still come through with the occasional thoroughly brilliant episode (e.g., Season 10's "Make Love, Not Warcraft," a pitch-perfect satire about online role-playing adventures, as well as a father trying to connect with his preteen son). Moreover, the show has managed to maintain its lewd, if whimsical, integrity; during Episode 1 of Season 7, a version of the Rake Scene revisits the series' inaugural show, in which aliens implant Cartman with an anal probe: the bare-tushed Cartman lies prostrate on an examination table, with the other boys, the elementary school's chef, and a scientist standing nearby. Cartman urges his friend Kyle to activate the probe with his finger; every time Kyle gets close, Cartman farts on him. For nearly ninety seconds this goes on, and those assembled provide a running commentary, including explicit acknowledgment of the scene's mechanics (CHEF: "It stopped being funny forty seconds ago. ... Okay, now it's funny again"). The routine is base, childish, and repetitive—but also disciplined, shrewd, and aware.

Around the time of *South Park*'s debut, the suits at Cartoon Network were trying to find a use for their back stock of aging Hanna-Barbera reels. How

they settled on reanimating the Sixties Saturday-morning cartoon *Space Ghost*, your guess is better than mine. (Mine: Their execs figured anyone watching Cartoon Network in the wee hours had to be baked.) *Space Ghost*'s body and actions got culled from the original animation cels, placed against new computer-generated backdrops, and voiced with new dialogue. Our cartoon hero became a delusional, narcissistically standoffish talk show host, his sidekicks and staff conscripted from among former nemeses. He asked clueless questions—via space video phone—to celebrity guests whom stoned young men might get excited about (Bob Denver, a.k.a. Gilligan) or with whom a Turner affiliate could finagle an interview (Susan Powter). Built around those interviews were loosely plotted animated segments jammed with non sequiturs, inside jokes, tangential thoughts, squabbling. *Space Ghost*, *Coast to Coast* ran on and off for ten years, and its best moments were truly original.

SPACE GHOST: Satan? Did I meet him?

At the open house?

MOLTAR: Yeah, he was that guy who was trying to get you to kill that girl.

ZORAK: Yeah, with the necktie, and the crown made of femurs.

SPACE GHOST: I don't remember him.

The budget for that episode reportedly ran out before animation was completed, so the writers decided to use old Yogi Bear footage for Satan, putting that crown of femurs around Yogi's head and providing him with a deep, menacing voice. Lore has it that Joe Barbera saw the episode while in hospital and sent a note that was anything but amused.

Such was the formula that built a programming block, and then a network within a network (after 11:00 P.M. Cartoon Network became Adult Swim, a distinct entity for ratings purposes and composed entirely of animation for adults). Short episodes (eleven-plus minutes of comedy, three or so of commercials) were made on the cheap—for as little as \$50,000 per episode, as compared with the reported \$1 million ceiling for *The Simpsons*—all of them in some way recycling or playing with forgotten cartoon footage. *Sealab 2021* provided a continuation of the life of

the underwater lab at the center of 1972's *Sealab 2020*, only now the habitat's captain was in love with his Happy Cake oven, a plucky blonde crew member constantly flashed her breasts, and every episode seemed to end with Sealab being blown up. *Harvey Birdman, Attorney at Law* gave a forgotten superhero (Birdman) a first name (in seeming tribute to a key figure in underground comix, Harvey Kurtzman) and put the masked, winged lawyer in court, where he prosecuted cases whose events had transpired inside the Saturday-morning-cartoon universe (a relative unknown named Stephen Colbert served as a voice-over regular). As the late-night lineup filled out around *Space Ghost*, the surreal potential of cartoons began to show a natural chemistry with alternative humor. And since no one had to worry about a viewer feeling sorry for drawings, the cartoons could say and do just about anything to one another. When heavyweights from the nascent alternative-comedy scene—Louis C.K., the late Mitch Hedberg—did voice-overs, their highly refined vocal control and interest in generic and formal subversion provided a cachet of hip legitimacy that's only grown with time's passing.

In retrospect, the only way a happening this postmodern, this self-aware, could incubate on American television was in a context where the expectations were low, the risk inconsequential. Were ratings at 2:00 A.M. on Cartoon Network going to go down? It would be funny to report that, yes, the ratings went down, but instead, in another subverted expectation, an original program—about a milk shake, a burger patty, and a serving of fries who fight crime, but mostly just sit around their dilapidated shared house in semi-urban New Jersey—gained a following. Then came the game changer: a broad, shtick-happy knockoff of *The Simpsons* that had been canceled after three seasons on Fox. Reruns of *Family Guy* on Adult Swim became the channel's biggest draw and pushed DVD box-set sales of the show's original seasons into the millions; *Family Guy* has since been revived by Fox, for which it is now both mainstay and syndication cash cow.

Ten years after *Family Guy*'s coup, two decades after the Rake Scene, animation's pop-culture satires are not just successful but institutional, and the lines

between what's mainstream and what's fringe—always fuzzy to begin with—have been further smudged, sometimes to the point of disappearing. Side by side with the aggressively juvenile appeal of *Family Guy*, Adult Swim now loads up on narrowly targeted animated comedies (*Metalocalypse*, *The Boondocks*), and has even branched into live-action shows (*Childrens Hospital*, *Eagleheart*), all working with a design-heavy mind-set and a viewership assumed to possess both new-media savvy and Internet-quick attention spans. In quantifiable ways, this formula works: in 2010, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a feature labeling Adult Swim “cable's go-to spot for smart, off-kilter late-night comedy,” and business magazines such as *Forbes* and *Fast Company* have run slobbery profiles about the “rise of a late night network” and how Adult Swim “stays edgy and creative.” Indeed, for the past eight years, from 11:00 P.M. to 2:00 A.M. six nights a week, Adult Swim consistently has been on top of basic-cable programming, as far as eighteen- to thirty-four-year-olds are concerned—meaning more young men watch it, and for longer stretches, than watch *SportsCenter*.

But there's a trade-off: like so much that is amusing in pop culture, like so many of the shows from which it is descended, Adult Swim programming, despite “edgy” and “creative” media labels, is so damned disposable. *Metalocalypse* is awesome so long as you are versed in the culture of black metal; *The Boondocks* is amazing if you love hip-hop culture (and have had your sense of humor surgically excised). Then there's *Family Guy*, which often waters down the tropes of better, groundbreaking shows, then thrusts them on viewers with a manic tap dance and open arms—sometimes literally, as in one deeply unfunny vaudeville about AIDS. The show also has a curious affection for variations on the Rake Scene, which will subject viewers to two and a half interminable minutes of Osama bin Laden hamming it up in outtakes from one of his cave videos, or titular dad Peter Griffin in an equally interminable wordless fistfight with a giant chicken. Well before reaching the white-light part where they can start being funny again, these jokes are beaten into the ground, with a rake, long outlasting the viewer's taste for tedium. (Naturally,

Family Guy creator Seth MacFarlane is the host of this year's Oscars.)

The more one watches Adult Swim, the more one wonders: Is there an answer to both the ephemera and the pabulum?

Sterling Malory Archer. Code name: Duchess. Rakishly handsome in perfectly tailored suits, the lead of FX's animated sitcom *Archer* is the greatest secret agent in the world, an assessment he cannot help but share when he's drunk (often) or trying to get laid (always). When Archer walks through the offices of the private ISIS (International Secret Intelligence Service) agency, every other employee flips him the bird. This might be because (also when drunk and trying to get laid) Archer's been known to call fellow ISIS agents in the field, blowing their cover and getting them killed; he's been known to beat Pam the human-resources director with her therapy dolphin until she pees herself. His domineering mother, Malory, owns and runs ISIS and won't tell Archer, or maybe doesn't remember, who his father is. Archer's working partner and ex-girlfriend, a statuesque queen of a drawing named Lana Kane, is happy to shoot Archer in the foot during any number of their innumerable arguments (because how else is he going to learn not to call her a “quadroon”?), and for a time rebounds from him by going out with ISIS's mild-mannered comptroller, Cyril, right as he plunges deeply into “sexual addiction.” There's Cheryl, a secretary who loves being choked and daydreams about burning the place to the ground (and also about being saved from a burning building by a burly fireman who then chokes her to death). And oh, yes, Krieger, ISIS's staff scientist, may have been cloned from Hitler's sperm. None of the relationships on the show are reductive, none of the characters imperturbably static. Witness Archer reaching into his briefs, pulling out a .25-caliber semi-automatic pistol (model name: Chekhov), and explaining to Cyril the fundamentals of secret agenting:

CYRIL: But when would you use an underwear gun?

ARCHER: Hopefully never. But say you're in a Caribbean bungalow and you're kinda high. An exotic woman on the bed. Now, is she just

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the high-priced whore you asked for? Or is she an assassin?

CYRIL: I don't know. I—

ARCHER: Oh, here's room service.

Who ordered champagne?

CYRIL: How should I know?

ARCHER: Exactly. You're baked. You can't remember. But since when does it take three huge surly Jamaican guys to deliver one bottle of champagne?

CYRIL: Oh, because they're assassins, too?

ARCHER: Or, maybe one guy's a new waiter. The second's one's training him. And the third's from maintenance, finally off his lazy ass to fix the AC.

CYRIL: Oh. Yeah, I guess that could happen.

ARCHER: Point is, you come out of the john waving this around, nobody's going to bug you for a tip.

In a time when intelligent people routinely third-degree one another in hopes of finding a new show worth watching, *Archer* remains relatively obscure. Now in its fourth season, it is the first significant step forward for animated comedy since *South Park*, and its pedigree can be seen in its resonantly talented cast, which includes *Arrested Development* alumnae Jessica Walter and Judy Greer (Malory and Cheryl, respectively) and Chris Parnell of *30 Rock* and *SNL* (as Cyril). Jeffrey Tambor and David Cross, also of *Arrested Development*, have had guest spots; so has Burt Reynolds. Archer's voice may garner particular approval among animation and comedy geeks: H. Jon Benjamin was onstage at those alternative Mondays all those years ago at the Luna Lounge and has done regular voice work in a number of animated comedies, including the role of Dr. Katz's son, Ben. As Archer, Benjamin is both playful puppy and spoiled frat brother; he brings hunky confidence, deep knowing, disdain, sarcasm, and outrage to the part, sprinkling them with boyish insecurity and tapping into something else, too—perhaps an unglamorous decade spent mostly doing voice-overs and sketch comedy. Adam Reed (the show's creator and principal writer) and Matt Thompson (Reed's creative partner) have similarly unpaved career paths: they started at Cartoon Network in the 1990s, first writing and performing fifteen-second promos with hand puppets, then scripting episodes of

Space Ghost, then developing, writing, and producing *Sealab 2021*. Although they were instrumental in setting the early tone for Adult Swim, after another show, *Frisky Dingo*, tanked, they saw that Adult Swim's culture was getting obviously younger; they were not. Reed decamped to Spain to get his bearings. At a café in Salamanca, he noticed a beautiful woman, and wondered how to approach her. A spy would have had a perfect line.

Adult Swim's anticomedy imprint is all over *Archer*, and although the appropriated secret-agent concept is in lockstep with the essentially post-modern nature of the show's forebears, there is a divergence. The spy genre gives the design staff a toy chest stuffed with muscle cars, well-cut fashions (tapered trousers and silver tie bars, Chanel skirt suits and curve-hugging go-go sweaterdresses), superlative midcentury office décor (Steuben barware and Saarinen conference rooms), and exotic locations (Monaco during a grand prix, private train cars on the New York–Quebec run). Hand drawings are turned into three-dimensional back-drop animation, and the results are often gorgeous, with palettes far richer and sets more expansive than anything we're accustomed to seeing in television cartoons. The visual tone of the show, like its deadpan, involuted gags, is *adult* in the sense of “grown-up,” as opposed to simply “not for kiddies.” Smartly employed juxtapositions then tilt this world just so: ISIS agents have cell phones and the Internet, but the office's computers are Eighties-looking clunkers, with square green letters flashing against coal-black screens; the company mainframe uses reel-to-reel magnetic tape, and it's the KGB that poses a constant threat to world peace.

Adding that much more to this mélange are the recognizable outlines of an astute workplace parody: the office staff creates and fills idle time with games of fuck/marry/kill, arguments about changes in health-care coverage, and discussions on how to beat the mandatory drug test. *Archer* is the only show I can think of that takes for granted a multidecade-, multimediuim-spanning, simultaneously high and low cultural literacy among its viewers, to the extent that when Archer calls karate the “Dane Cook of martial arts,” there's no attempt

to explain how little respect Dane Cook's act—massively popular with pre-pubescent boys—gets among professional comedians. Archer's manservant (CASUAL-SEX PROSPECT: "Isn't it pronounced *vah-lay*?" ARCHER: "Only if he's parking your car") is named Woodhouse. And if Woodhouse occasionally gets his clothes thrown off the balcony of Archer's Manhattan penthouse—"Because how hard is it to poach a goddamn egg properly?"—he also stars in what I could swear is a reworking of Gore Vidal's story of true love lost during wartime, now transformed into a reminiscence of love between Woodhouse and his squad leader, cut short in the trenches of the Western Front:

WOODHOUSE: Lieutenant Sripes abhorred the way Reggie—er, Captain Thistleton—*carried on* with the men.

ARCHER: [*Amusing himself*] Yeah, didn't Oscar Wilde get hard labor for that?

WOODHOUSE: What are you talking about?

ARCHER: I'm—wait, what're you talking about?

So long as you follow the plot, a caught reference—say, hitting pause, then searching to discover that Pam's back tattoo is the third stanza of Byron's "The Destruction of Sennacherib," or that Cheryl's pet ocelot, Babou, is named after an ocelot once owned by Salvador Dalí—is only a delicious bonus.

"The most important thing in the process," Adam Reed told one interviewer last year, "is getting the audio cut to sound perfect. . . . If the audio cut isn't working, then no amount of visuals is going to help that. So my goal is to have it so you can enjoy *Archer* just in the tape deck in the car." A widely taught creative-writing exercise asks students to read their work out loud. To pass an ear test a sentence must be tightly written: false notes grate; the simplest noun has to fight to justify its presence. Since jokes and routines already depend on timing, word choice, and word placement, linguistic precision must be that much more exact, and *Archer* nails its every line, harking back to the quick, tight pace of golden-age radio and screwball comedies. During his more than decade at Adult Swim, Reed wrote several episodes of *Sealab 2021* taut

enough to serve as models for aspiring screen- and comedy writers; more often, though, he was happy to bang a joke pretty damn hard with his own rake, and his oeuvre betrayed a writer too in love with confounding expectations, too eager to abandon his heroes and follow some secondary (more likely tertiary) character, one he knew viewers actively disliked—as if he were taunting the audience, as if the joke were really on you. *Archer* certainly employs a number of now de rigueur alt-comedy tropes: a fondness for delayed payoffs, punch lines that serve as trapdoors or springboards to other jokes, recurring in-jokes that reward dedicated viewers. But Reed has finally—or at least mostly—embraced a basic and unavoidable truth: No matter how funny you are as a writer, if you continually abandon characters and digress from a plot, you thin a story until it is vapor, leaving only the combustible cleverness and a match for your story's self-immolation.

Fortunately, *Archer* has both specificity and discipline. Plots matter. Subplots show up during natural breathing points. Jokes have room to wander—but only so far. And even as supporting cast members constantly threaten to steal episodes, they never do. It has been a particular pleasure to watch the supporting cast gradually and gently develop into fully hilarious characters, with the many excellent women here—unlike in so many of *Archer*'s animated predecessors—delivering actual punch lines, not just setups.

CHERYL: And bring me some stuff to do—it's crazy stupid boring in here.

ARCHER: Well, now you know how Babou feels.

CHERYL: Crepuscular?

Or:

LANA: No words. My words have failed me.

MALORY: Then shut up. [*Pauses for a drink.*] So what do you think?

LANA: Oh, sorry, I thought you said shut up.

MALORY: And yet you talk.

Even as the show's universe fills in further, as time passes with a degree of continuity and each episode yet stands alone (so that first-time viewers can join in without a remedial Netflix marathon), even amid the wonderfully



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insane recursions of cultural and literary references, the insults followed by dirty banter followed by dangerous edge-play sex followed by more insults—the heart of the show remains Archer arguing with Malory, Archer arguing with Lana, Archer putting Cyril down.

ARCHER: Oh my God! You killed a hooker!

CYRIL: Call girl.

ARCHER: No, Cyril—

CYRIL: She was a call girl.

ARCHER: —when they're dead, they're just hookers. God, I said *the cap slips off the poison pen for no reason*, didn't I? ... Woodhouse!

WOODHOUSE: Fetching a rug, sir.

ARCHER: Now he's fetching a rug.

HAPPY, CYRIL?

CYRIL: NO. NO, I'M NOT HAPPY.

ARCHER: Well, guess what? Me neither.

I mean, big picture, I wouldn't say I'm a happy person.

In the course of the first three seasons, Archer has had a mind-control chip implanted into his brain, come up positive on a paternity test for an infant who's not his, and been responsible for the murder of the man he thought was his father. To save his life, his fiancée, at their wedding, hurled herself off the same penthouse balcony as Woodhouse's clothes; Archer has seen her resurrected as a cyborg, then been abandoned by her for his archenemy (also newly a cyborg). He's met his hero, Burt Reynolds, only to learn Reynolds is sleeping with his mother. Archer has been a pirate king *and* traveled to outer space. How far can Reed push this show before it either spins out of control or feels completely done?

The biggest reason for optimism, and a key to the show's artistic success, was on display in back-to-back episodes in Season 2, when Archer is diagnosed with cancer (amid colleagues' gasps and supportive remarks, Cheryl asks, "What's cancer?"). While in treatment, he befriends an elderly lady with the same diagnosis, and she explains to him the wonders of the Regis show. Then a pharmacy turns out to have replaced their chemotherapy medicine with Zima and sugar pills (in order to sell the real stuff on the black market), which results in his friend's death. A head-scarfed, emaciated, vomiting, medical-marijuana-smoking, IV-toting

Archer goes on a self-declared "ram-page," tracking the mobsters responsible and capturing his revenge on videotape (to which rough cut he gives the working title "Terms of Entrampagement"). During the episode's climactic confrontation, Archer asks the crime syndicate's boss, an old, unarmed man on a respirator, whether he watched Regis that morning. "Yeah," is the response. "Why?" The camera then captures Archer's stone face, his blank, bloodshot eyes. He raises the gun, fires. The subsequent moment of frozen silence is bleak and nihilistic, conveying the price of revenge, the cost to Archer's soul. That it's so shocking is a testament to the character and the writing and the oddly multifaceted nature of what is in fact a sitcom cartoon. And then: the static bands of a paused VCR on-screen. A rewind. The kill shot replayed, replayed again, Archer screaming out admiration for his own work, the rest of the gang at ISIS complaining that he's been playing that video every Friday for the past twelve weeks—the Rake Scene humanizing him, showing he's back, happily for us, to his native idiocy. ■

March Index Sources

1,2 Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (Washington); 3 Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center (Washington); 4,5 Rasmussen Reports (Asbury Park, N.J.); 6 *New York Times*; 7,8 Sunlight Foundation (Washington); 9 Small Arms Survey (Norfolk, Va.); 10 FBI Crime Reporting Program (Clarksburg, W.Va.); 11 National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention (Atlanta); 12 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Atlanta); 13,14 *The Lancet* (N.Y.C.); 15 *Harper's* research; 16 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Atlanta); 17 Office of the Mayor (Los Angeles); 18 Colorado Supreme Court (Denver); 19 University of Colorado (Denver); 20 Jean Twenge, San Diego State University; 21 Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (Washington); 22 Michigan House of Representatives (Lansing); 23 Association for Democratic Reforms (New Delhi); 24 *Harper's* research; 25 Cuddle Workshop (London); 26 Slátturfélag Sudurlands (Reykjavík); 27 Pew Health Group (Washington); 28 Fogarty International Center, National Institute of Health (Bethesda, Md.); 29,30 *The Lancet* (N.Y.C.); 31 New America Foundation (Washington); 32 YouTube (San Bruno, Calif.); 33 Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (Washington); 34 Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (Syracuse, N.Y.); 35 The Nobel Foundation (Stockholm); 36 Marc Gans, UCLA School of Law; 37–39 Office of the Pardon Attorney (Washington).

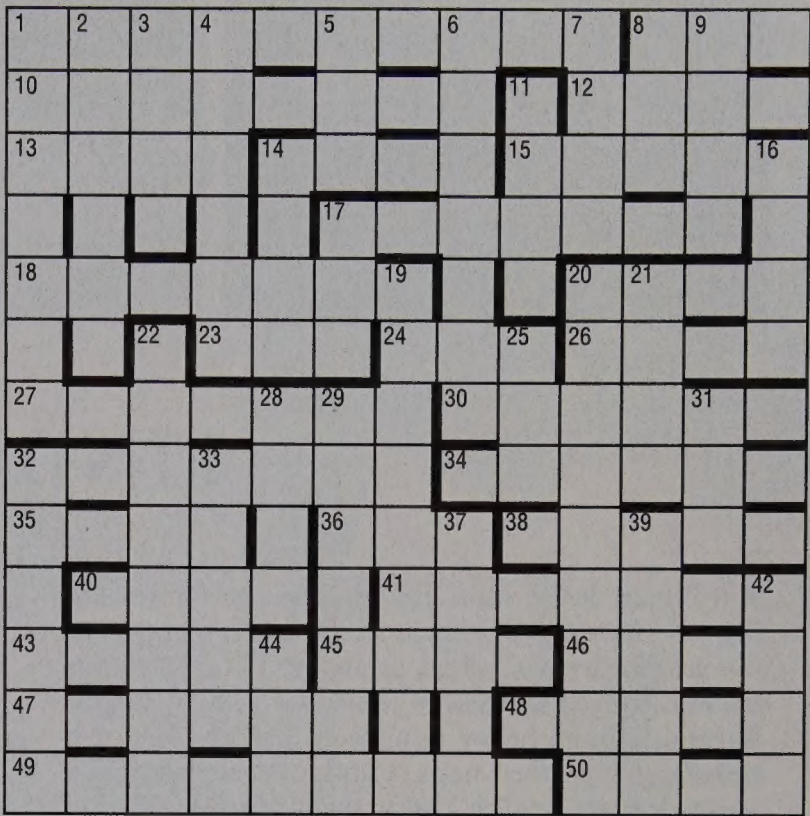
PUZZLE

TITLE SEARCH

By Richard E. Maltby Jr.

The four-word phrase created by 49 Across plus 16 Down provides an appropriate title for this puzzle—which should lead the solver to a single square where something valuable may be found. Solvers should circle that square and its contents.

Answers include twelve proper nouns and one foreign word. 1D and 44D are uncommon words; 7D and 22D are obscure. 40A is a common variant. As always, mental repunctuation of a clue is the key to its solution. The solution to last month's puzzle appears on page 63.



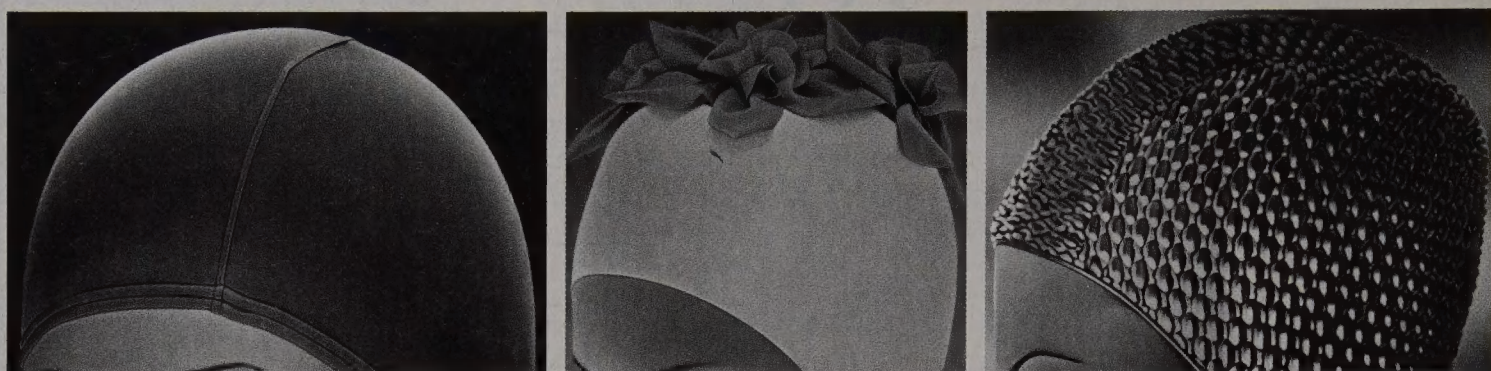
ACROSS

1. Alien avoiding people repairing phone boxes (10)
8. Airport weak in security, perhaps? (3)
10. Work out strike without hesitation! (8)
12. Back of army's rear conceals a number of Romans showing cunning (4)
13. "Movie theater seating inside"—clear oxymoron (4)
14. Felt badly? That's not right! (4)
15. Mel Gibson, in a number of movies, is found in dresses (5)
17. Shines again, relating to W, X, Y, and Z, perhaps! (7)
18. One Latin among male and female brewers (7)
20. Nothing low in nineteenth-century writing (4)
23. Conjugating verbs, explaining where they link (3)
24. River or island in England? Sounds like the former (3)
26. Big container that holds sulfur (4)
27. Material expands out! (7)
30. In attempt to include last page, ... (6)
32. ... study writing conditions (7)
34. Old Persian reproductions with nothing removed (6)
35. Storied princess or Australian mummy? (4)
36. Bar return from second place to the top (3)
38. It's noble when there's nobody back following Sargent's madame (5)
40. Cute little thing starting duets for piano and xylophone (4)
41. Agents for star in *Chicago* restricted by addition to letter (7)
43. Announcing choices will, quickly, but that's just part of the picture (5)
45. It's almost enough to make an antelope dash (4)
46. Speaking of eggs, it is way out (4)
47. Water, etc., needed for leather when heat drops (6)
48. Campus luminary, creator of Pyrex (5)
49. (see instructions)
50. Mother cut off mold in breakfast food (4)

DOWN

1. Sign of times: psychiatrist's sexual drive is drying up (7)
2. Unusual European toxic wastes (6)
3. Navy extension on deck (4)
4. Horny Africans or hot revolutionary (6)
5. Speed hailed, but evens out (3)
6. In the middle of poker play, eating candy bar (7)
7. San Francisco airport, crossing from Tunisian seaport (4)
8. Rocket fuel oxidizer featured in *Nova* (3)
9. Can is from Italy, Germany, Japan (4)
11. Big picture shows: statement Bo Derek might have texted? (4)
14. Looks, sounds sumptuous (4)
16. (see instructions)
17. Stout writing in ruins when recited (3)
19. Exult when interbreeding with pets to produce a bit of a litter (9)
20. Push here, heading off being sucked into vortex, destroyed (9)
21. Common cat name fills out the limit (4)
22. Random mating is plain—just look at the odds: 9 to 1 in Massachusetts (8)
25. We're not starting before (3)
28. Upper floor of a ship, third level, say? (4)
29. Quickly, say (7)
31. Thanks to God, just the starter in hockey team cut from video (3)
32. One involved in a row outside that hurts people initially—it can produce a bum steer! (6)
33. Given duties, but fired after a short time (5)
37. They support Westchester's center forward (5)
39. One saying no president gets on being replaced by monarch! (5)
42. Mythical flower, branches for ears (4)
44. Unofficial news release, not a change in Albania (3)

Contest Rules: Send completed diagram with name and address to "Title Search," *Harper's Magazine*, 666 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012. If you already subscribe to *Harper's*, please include a copy of your latest mailing label. Entries must be received by March 15. Senders of the first three correct solutions opened at random will receive one-year subscriptions to *Harper's Magazine* (limit one winner per household per year). Winners' names will be printed in the May issue. Winners of the January puzzle, "Happy New Year," are Nancy Shepherdson, Barrington, Ill.; Tom Swanson, Portland, Ore.; and Dean Yannias, Gallup, N.M.



FINDINGS

In Britain, lions, snow leopards, and tigers were playing with discarded Christmas trees, Danish scurvy grass was growing in salty verges, titpox was hitting great tits hardest (the red squirrels of Jersey, meanwhile, suffered no squirrelopox), heavy rains were washing Scottish hedgehogs from their nests, a flock of sheep adopted a young deer at Dunwich Heath, two dragons hatched in Cambridgeshire, and two men were charged with hare coursing in Lincolnshire, where the feet and heads of swans were being found without their bodies. "It is quite clear," said a local police constable, "that something is not quite right." In Australia, an arsonist attacked two ghost gums, a Welshman wrestled a dusky whaler shark, and a scrub python climbed aboard the wing of a plane bound for Papua New Guinea but died before reaching its destination. In Nepal, where protesters demanded the execution of a rogue elephant, the government committed to a tiger cap. A pack of stray dogs in India frightened several blackbucks to death. Vietnamese officials allowed a sanctuary for retired bile bears to remain operational in spite of public-health concerns. Flooding in South Africa allowed the escape of 15,000 farm crocodiles. "There used to be only a few crocodiles in the Limpopo River," said the farm manager. "Now there are a lot." The Barbary macaques of Gibraltar were biting people for want of chocolate. Bored mink snack between meals and lie awake in bed. Californians were petitioning the White House to end the state's largely unenforced ban on ferrets. "It's hard to get in trouble with a ferret," said an activist. Dolphins on the Gulf Coast were washing up with tails hacked off and wounds from screwdrivers and 9mm bullets. A dead hummingbird was reported to have been found in the pocket of a dead man in the Sonoran Desert.

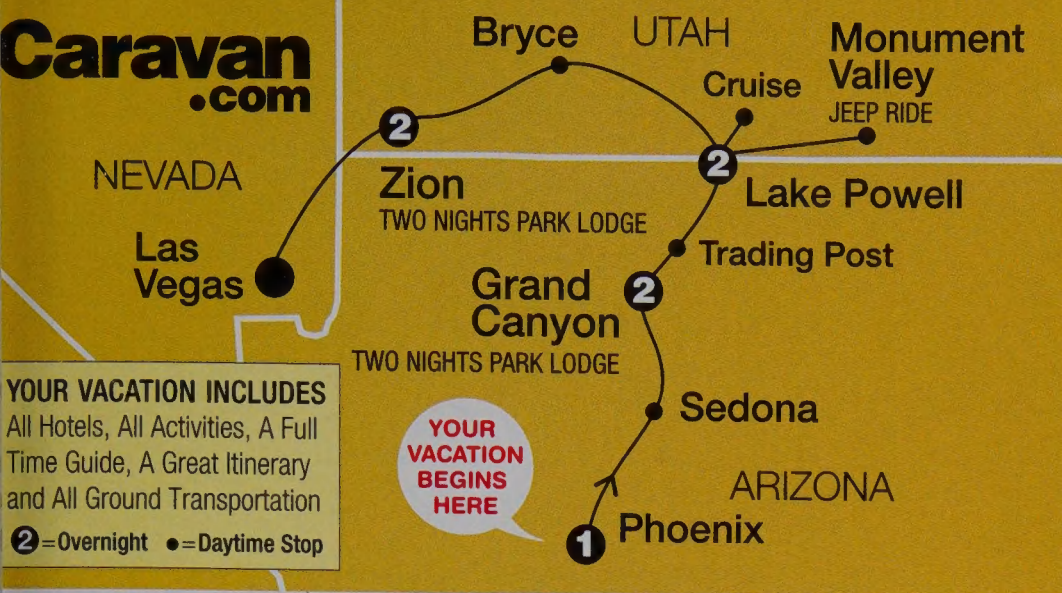
In Canada, children were found to start lying by the age of two, more garbage per capita was being produced

than anywhere else in the world, gonorrhea defeated cefixime, and new 20-, 50-, and 100-dollar notes were found to feature the leaf of the invasive Norway maple rather than that of the native sugar maple. Shortened penises were among the complaints of radical prostatectomy patients, according to a study of men in the COMPARE registry. Biologists debuted RePOOPulate to replace human fecal transplants. The breast milk of fatter mothers contains fewer species of bacteria, as does that of mothers whose caesarean sections are planned. Allosuckling was found to broaden the antibody profile of newborn Mongolian gerbils. The Fraunhofer-Institut für Zuverlässigkeit und Mikrointegration unveiled a onesie to prevent crib death. Dutch doctors successfully reduced the use of morphine during surgery on infants. China's One Child Policy was producing adults who are less competitive, conscientious, trusting, and trustworthy, and more risk-averse and pessimistic. Eighteen percent of bullied autistic children fight back.

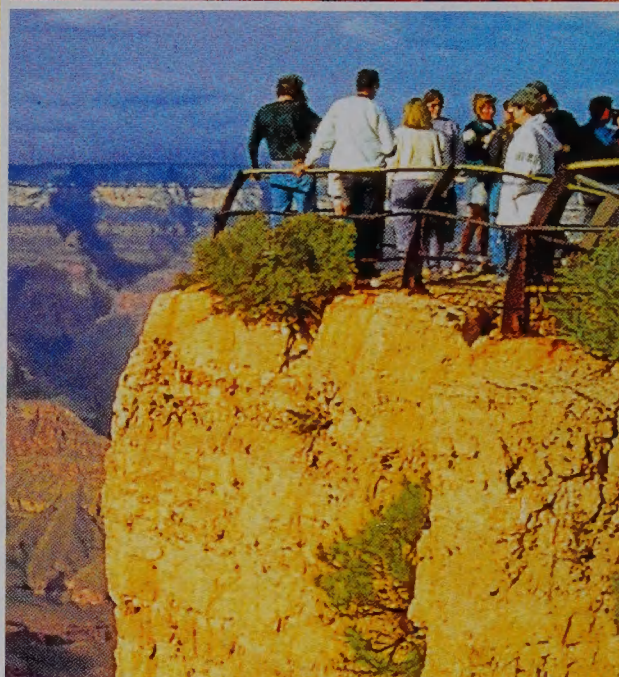
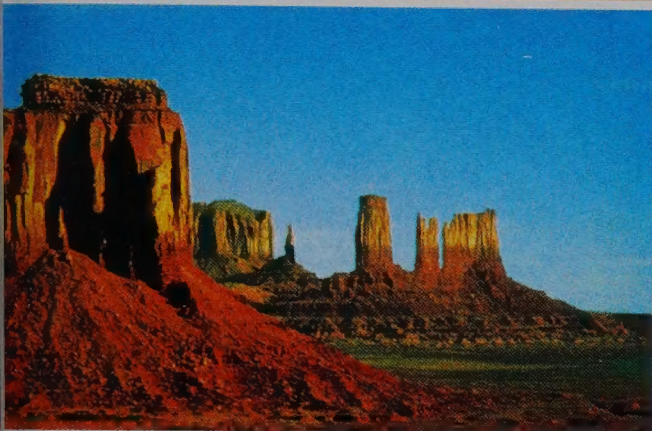
The first dinosaur, the first stone spear, the first subduction volcanism, and the Grand Canyon were all found to have appeared earlier than previously believed. Astronomers measured interaction between the universe's diffuse extragalactic background light and the gamma rays of nearby blazars. Belgian astronomers found that the surface temperature of the hypergiant HR 8752 had increased by 60 percent in three decades as the star passed through the Yellow Evolutionary Void. Betelgeuse was on course to collide with a wall of dust around 7,000 A.D., but Apophis will not hit Earth in 2036. The Large Quasar Group was found to be 4 billion light-years across and therefore too large to exist. Matter, it was discovered, can be used to tell time. "A rock," said physicist Holger Müller, "is a clock."

*Blue Lycra, Floral Float, and Bubble Crepe, paintings by James Rieck.
Courtesy the artist and Lyons Wier Gallery, New York City*

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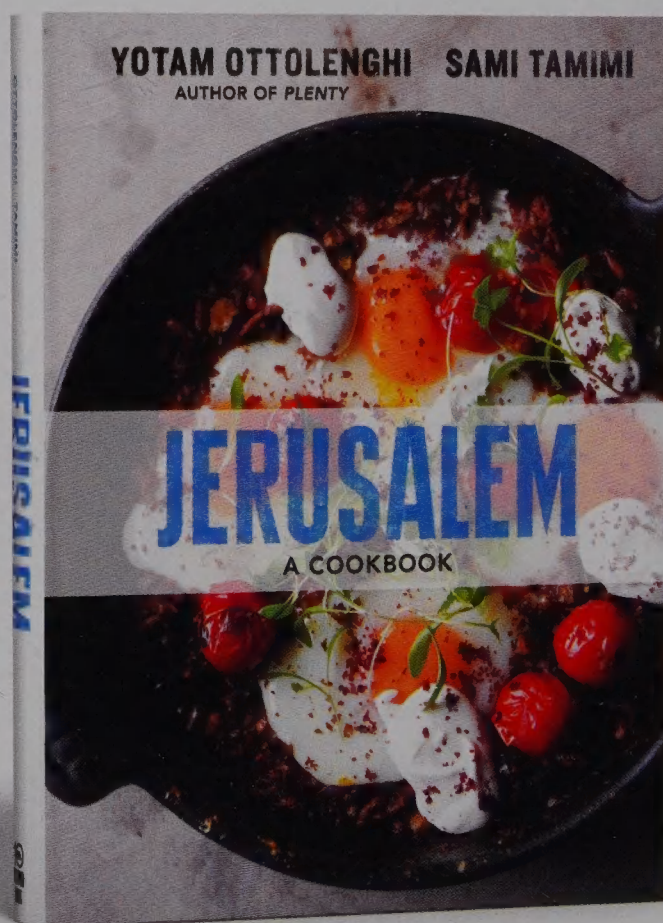
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